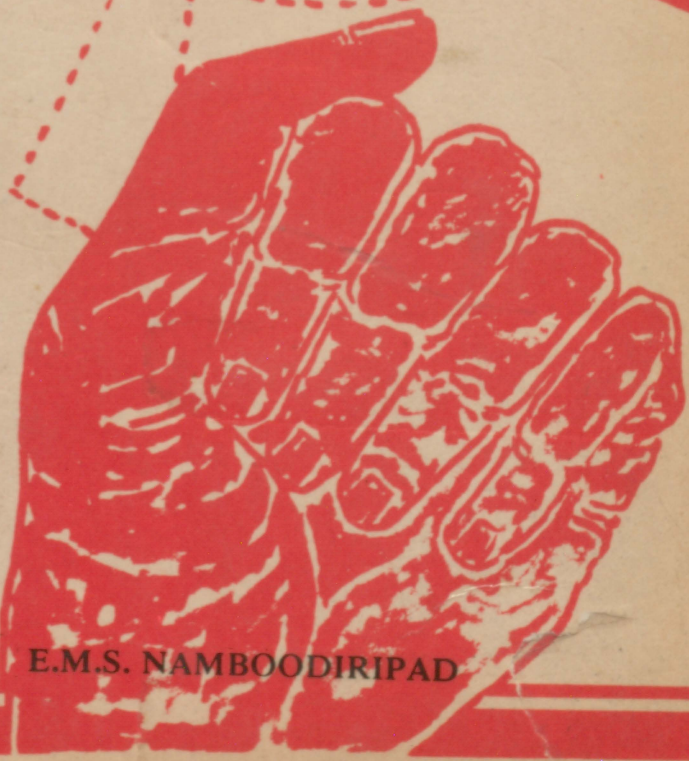
REMINISCENCES

OF AN INDIAN COMMUNIST



E.M.S. NAMBOODIRIPAD

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Reminiscences of An Indian Communist

E.M.S. Namboodiripad

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PREFACE

MY *REMINISCENCES* IS COMING OUT IN A YEAR which is significant in the history of the Communist Party in Kerala ; it is the Golden Jubilee year of the formation of the Party in the state. The Kerala state committee of the CPI(M) is observing the Jubilee with a programme which will extend over the whole latter half of the year

The year is significant in still another respect : the state elections that took place in the first quarter of this year (March 23) returned the Left Democratic Front as the ruling combination—a result which constituted a rebuff to the ruling Congress party. The caste-communal parties which, for over three decades, have been indulging in the politics of alternately bargaining with the Congress and the left parties, have also been humbled. For the first time since 1957, a ruling combination not dependent on any caste or communal party has come into existence.

This electoral victory of the communist-led Left Democratic Front will, no doubt, make people (in Kerala and outside) ponder over how this was made possible The state is so caste-ridden that it was called by Swami Vivekanand, nearly a century ago, a "lunatic asylum". Electoral politics, too, was moulded along caste lines, each caste having its own political party, besides there being definite caste factions in such secular parties as the Congress. In terms of religious communities, the state's population is divided into the majority Hindu (about 60 per cent) and two minority (Christian and Muslim) communities (40 per cent). The existence of these caste-communal formations was effectively used by the Congress against the left since the later 1950s when the latter won an electoral victory. It is this combination that has finally been dealt a heavy blow.

How was this made possible ? How is it that a tiny four-member Kerala unit of the CPI of 1937, developed into the strongest political party in the state in the course of half-a-century ? Furthermore, how is that, at the all-India level, too, the Communist Party which was relatively weak fifty years ago, has today become the only force which runs governments in three states (including Kerala) and has a clear perspective concerning the all-round development of the country ? And, finally, how is it that the CPI(M) which, for several years, was considered out of the pale of the international communist movement, has now become a contingent of the international movement along with the CPI, and the recognised head of the Left Front and Left Democratic Front governments in three states ? These are the questions posed by the political developments of the last few weeks,

I hope that the story narrated here will throw some light on these questions. It is the story of a person who had to fight the socio-political environment in which he was born and brought up, to become a communist and, then, having joined the Communist Party, had to get involved in the inner-party struggle for the correct line—first within the united Party, and then within the CPI(M).

When I started work on this, I had the readership in Kerala alone in mind. I therefore wrote my autobiography (*Atma Katha*) in Malayalam which was translated into English under the title *How I Became A Communist*. I had then flirted with the idea of continuing the story in future volumes, bringing it up-to-date. The critical comments received on the book, however, made me give up the idea and take up the work of writing (again in Malayalam) a connected story of the formation and development of the Communist Party in Kerala. That has now been completed, the third (and last) volume of the book having already come out.

Both my original autobiography and the subsequent historical account of the genesis and growth of the Communist Party in Kerala having been written in Malayalam with the Kerala readership in mind, they perhaps contain too many details for the outside reader. I therefore, decided to combine the two in a

condensed form in English. The result is this compact volume, less than a quarter in size of the two volumes in Malayalam.

Let me make it clear that I am not giving my reminiscenses in *general*, but reminiscenses *as an Indian communist*. This, of course, contains my reminiscenses of pre-communist years, but only to the extent necessary for narrating the story of my transformation into a communist—a transformation which was described by a friend to have been "from the *Rigveda* to the works of Karl Marx, from Brahmasree (an apellation used for Namboodiri Brahmins) to a comrade and from a *jenmi* landlord to the Chief Minister who played a key role in the enactment of agrarian legislation". I do look back with satisfaction on my 78 years, out of which over 50 were spent in building the Communist Party. My only regret is that I could not get in touch with the then existing Communist Party and join it earlier.

My pre-communist life, it can be seen, was spent exclusively in Kerala where I was active in radical socio-cultural reforms, to begin with, and then in left politics. This took me on to the second part of my life when I became a communist and started working simultaneously in Kerala and on a national plane. Then comes the last phase (beginning with the '50s) when I worked on a national plane and, to a limited extent, on an international one, without uprooting myself from Kerala. The experience of all this is being given here.

I take this opportunity to thank all those (in India and abroad) who took interest in knowing my life-story, and asked me to put it in writing. I want to state further that, being nothing more than reminiscenses, this is bound to contain factual inaccuracies and political assessments which are not exactly correct. Even with these deficiencies, I thought, the volume would be useful for those who seek information on the developments covered here.

New Delhi,
May 31,1987

E.M.S. NAMBOODIRIPAD

ERRATA

p. 5	line 2 from above	read 'raining' for 'saining'
p. 20	line 1 from above	read 'only' for 'olny'
p. 27	line 9 from above	read 'enraged' for 'encouraged'
p. 31	line 19 from above	delete 'reforms'
	line 22 from above	delete 'in'
	line 8 from below	read 'meetings' for 'meeting'
p. 32	line 11 from above	add 'me' after 'helped'
p. 33	line 14 from below	add 'the younger' before 'Nehru'
p. 35	lines 15-17 from above	delete 'participate..... contributions'
p. 40	line 3 from above	add 'and' after 'agitation'
p. 74	line 11 from below	delete 'solid'
p. 75	line 2 from above	read '1938-40' for '1939-40'
p. 80	line 7 from above	read 'stammerer' for 'stammer'
p. 90	line 16 from above	add ' I ' after 'When'
p. 92	line 4 from above	add 'drops' after 'few'
p. 94	line 3 from above	delete 'she'
p. 109	line 5 from below	read 'religio for 're io'
p. 120	line 4 from below	read 'no' for 'two'
p. 124	line 1 from above	read 'The views' for 'Under the views'
	line 2 from above	read 'presented in two' for 'presented two'

p. 130	line 7 from above	read 'restoring' for 'resorting'
p. 134	line 20 from above	read 'took' for 'take'
p. 139	line 4 from above	delete 'was'
p. 142	line 15 from below	read 'but they' for 'they but'
p. 150	line 9 from above	delete 'Party'
p. 174	line 9 from below	delete 'if'
p. 191	line 9 from above	read 'affix' for 'fix
p. 212	last line	add 'with' after 'confronted'
p. 214	line 3 from above	read '50th' for '40th'
p. 216	line 20 from above	add 'Koreas' before 'which'
	line 21 from above	delete 'Koreas'
p. 217	line 2 from above	delete 'some'
p. 219	line 9 from below	after 'raise' add 'the danger of sectarianism. As was pointed out in'
p. 221	line 3 from above	after 'question', add 'of nationalities in India. Furthermore, the impending elections'

CONTENTS

Preface		(v)
Errata		(ix)
Chapter		*Page*
1.	Bolshevism	1
2.	A Century and A Half of Radical Social Changes	7
3.	Indian (and Kerala) Politics in the Early Twenties	15
4.	The Congress and the Left	22
5.	Education in School and Public Life	28
6.	Into the Wider World of Public Work	35
7.	The Plunge	43
8.	The Second Crisis of Gandhian Leadership	49
9.	Why Socialism—And How	55
10.	Six Years of Advance	64
11.	Underground	75
12.	From Imperialist to People's War	83
13.	The Agony of Attachment and Separation	91
14.	The First Party Congress	97
15.	Pakistan and National Unity	02
16.	The Final Assault	07
17.	United Struggles versus Communal Riots	115
18.	The Telangana Way	123

19. The Balance-Sheet of Inner-Party Struggle 131
20. Parliamentary Forum 137
21. The Third Party Congress 146
22. Khruschovism and the CPI 151
23. The Chinese Party Congress 157
24. Office with No Real Power 164
25. The Kerala Way ! 173
26. The Great Divide 183
27. Against Revisionism and Sectarianism 192
28. People's Democracy vs. National Democracy 201
29. International Relations 212
30. Inner-Party Struggles after 1964 219

CHAPTER 1

BOLSHEVISM

I DO NOT REMEMBER THE DATE. IT MUST HAVE been some time in 1922 or 1923 when I was a boy of 13 or 14. For the first time in my life, I heard the word "Bolshevism" which, for the speaker and the listeners, meant nothing less than the destruction of all that they valued in life.

The occasion was an election campaign in which the highly restricted electorate had to exercise its vote for the Madras Legislative Council. One of the candidates had pledged himself to get a bill passed to curb the powers of the landlords in Malabar who could evict their tenants at will, increase the rates of rent, etc., and use all this to harass the large number of tenants who depended on the cultivation of leased land for their livelihood. Those who visited our family were canvassing votes against the candidate standing for the bill. The adoption and implementation of that bill, it was pointed out, would ruin families like ours "just as Bolshevism did in Russia"!

The system which the proposed bill was supposed to be destroying may be described as "the domination of the caste hierarchy, the rent-collecting landlord (*jenmi*) and the successors of former feudal rulers". That was the phrase coined by me later in my first work (on the history of Kerala, in Malayalam) to describe the Kerala pattern of the feudal order. Our family belonged to this dominant group in all three respects.

We were high caste and orthodox Brahmins for whom all that smacked of modernism was taboo. Along with my brothers, I was brought up in an atmosphere in which modern school

education was unthinkable. Study of scriptures like the *Rigveda*, living a life of piety and worshipping the gods, scrupulously observing all customs and manners of society handed down from generation to generation—this was what had been prescribed for us.

New winds, however, were blowing all around, making selected individuals in the community take to modern school education. Not in ordinary schools where "all and sundry", i.e., boys from the "lower" castes would rub shoulders with "high caste" boys but in a "special school" where only Namboodiri boys were admitted, and teaching there included subjects considered to be "specially required" for the boys of this community. Two of my elder brothers spent a few months in this special school. I, however, was considered to be "too intelligent" to be "condemned" to this type of "inferior education" and was, therefore, directed to confine myself to the study of Sanskrit *kavyas* starting with the *Rigveda*.

Our family not only belonged to the highest rung in the caste hierarchy, but had extensive lands of its own. Not a square inch, however, was cultivated by us, the entire land being leased out to tenants who paid us rent, mostly in kind. They (the tenants) were also dependent on us on social occasions. Births or deaths, marriages or other occasions in the family, were to be observed by them with gifts to be presented to us, while we were expected to give them something in return. I remember vividly festive occasions like Onam and Vishu when we boys would be sitting in the verandah receiving gifts from the tenants and sometimes presenting them something in return. Our relations with them, in short, were those of lords and serfs in the medieval sense of the term, rather than those of modern landlords and tenants.

Another feature of the society into which I was born was that, just as the tenants were dependent on us for their livelihood, we too were dependent, for our family honour and prestige, on the feudal chieftain of the area. Our family was considered among such *jenmi* households as were to be associated with the installation of the ex-ruling chieftain of the area—the Raja of Walluvanad who, as the ex-ruler, used to get a pension from the British Government. Although just a rent-

receiving landlord for all practical purposes, the eldest member of the family had to go through the formality of a ceremonial installation as the new "Raja" if he was to be registered with the British Government and receive the pension. In this ceremonial function, the eldest male member of our family was traditionally supposed to participate. Down to our generation, our family strictly observed all these formalities, of which I have only the benefit of hearing.

Of the three factors mentioned above, the last—the authority of the former feudal chieftain—had disappeared in all but name. Not so the other two; the dominance of "high" over "low" castes, and the *jenmies* or the landlords over the tenants, continued. Rules of untouchability and unapproachability—a "high" caste person being considered "polluted" if an Ezhava came so many feet near him, a Pulaya so many feet, and so on—were strictly observed. So were the rules of conduct for tenants in their dealings with the *jenmies* or landlords. It was to these that a blow was struck by the tenancy agitation. Hence the vehemence with which our visitors denounced the proposed tenancy bill as Bolshevism!

As a boy who did not have the benefit of modern school education, I could not understand what was being said by our visitors. As a matter of fact, I took it as natural that the "high caste" people and the *jenmi* landlords should continue to enjoy all the powers and privileges which they had, though the little reading of newspapers that I did (including some news of Mahatma Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement) made me feel that all was not well with our society. Gandhi's clarion call against untouchability, for Hindu-Muslim unity, etc., evoked in me a sympathetic chord. I had been stirred by his call for Swaraj, had in fact taken to the wearing of Khadi, study of Hindi as the *Rashtra Bhasha*, etc. But I could not come to accept the rationale of upsetting the *jenmi*-tenant relationship, though I was keenly following the furious debate in the newspapers between the pro- and anti-tenancy *billwallas*.

Political developments in the country and the world, together with the evolution of my own life, however, made such an impact on me that, within less than a decade after I first heard the word Bolshevism, I became an ardent admirer of the

Bolshevik Party and its government in the USSR. The rapid advance of socialist planning in the first land of proletarian dictatorship, co-existing with a crisis-ridden capitalist world, made me, like tens of thousands of my generation, look up to Bolshevism as the path for India to follow. It did not take me long after that to declare myself a Communist and work as one.

I, however, was one in a microscopic minority of those who, for the first time, turned Bolshevik in Kerala. Unlike me and a few others who came from the same background, the overwhelming majority came from the "lower caste"—families of workers, peasants or other sections of the working people. They, like us, were stirred by the epoch-making changes that were rocking the world. Cutting across caste, class and other differences, we were all moved by the Salt Satyagraha led by Mahatma Gandhi; stirred by the martyrdom of Jatin Das, Bhagat Singh and his two comrades in Punjab, and by the innumerable men and women who braved the British lathis, bayonets and rifles to assert the country's independence. We were inspired by the revolutionaries of Bengal and elsewhere—slandered as "terrorists"—who eluded the police and organised heroic actions against the hated British agents. While getting disillusioned with Gandhism and moving towards the Left, we heard and read about the Soviet "experiment", and about the anti-Communist Meerut Conspiracy case trial.

One of the young men and women who were thus attracted towards Bolshevism was Krishna Pillai—the magnetic personality around whom we all swarmed. Unlike me, he came from a family of pauperised peasants. Unlike me again, he had no opportunity to get educated: he did not even complete the primary school, not to speak of high school and college. After a stint of service in a factory and a plantation in his native place, Travancore, he went to north India to get a job and, if possible, some education. The former he failed to secure, but the latter (in some form) was available. During the few years he spent there, he educated himself sufficiently to come back as a trained Hindi teacher. Another part of his education was the wide contacts he established with the revolutionaries in the north. Joining as a volunteer in the Salt Satyagraha, he made a mark.

by holding the national flag high in his hands, defying the police who were saining lathis all over his body to snatch the flag from him. His uncompromising stand on every political issue and his sharp tongue provoked the anger not only of the police and jail warders but also of the "respectable" lawyer-politicians who were at the helm of Congress affairs ; he however, earned the affection of ordinary Congressmen. His contribution to the coming together of a whole generation of honest young Congressmen, making them Leftists, then Congress Socialists, and finally Communists is greater than that of anyone of us. Without minimising the role that each of us played in the process, I may say that if any single individual is to be called the founder-leader of the Communist Party in Kerala, that credit should go to Krishna Pillai.

Pillai, however, was only one instance. There were scores of others who belonged to what is called the "lower middle class" and a few wage- or salary-earning employees who, like us from the "high" society, plunged into the anti-imperialist movement, adopted Left positions and were in the end attracted towards Bolshevism. The further we advanced towards the revolutionary movement, the more was the revolutionary party built as an organisation, the larger the number of those who came to the movement from the "lower castes", from worker, peasant and other toiler families. The Communist Party in Kerala has, from its very inception, had a real proletarian class composition.

Why, then, did the likes of me join in taking the initiative in forming the Party and devote our whole life to develop it, defying our elders for whom even the extremely moderate reforms incorporated in the Malabar Tenancy Bill of the 1920s was Bolshevism ? Because, as the *Communist Manifesto* scientifically explains :

> In times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour, the process of dissolution going on within the ruling class, in fact within the whole range of old society, assumes such a violent, glaring character, that a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands.

The co-existence of the worst world economic crisis in the

history of capitalism and the breath-taking speed with which a backward country (Russia) was modernising itself was an eye-opener for every Indian. Confirmed ideologues of Indian capitalism, like the late Visweswarayya, opted for planning the Indian economy as in the USSR but without its socialist basis. Jawaharlal Nehru joined in popularising the achievements of the Soviet Union while deploring what he considered "undesirable" in the Soviet Union. The difference between Visweswarayya and Nehru, on the one hand, and the like of us, on the other, was that while the former had their allegiance to the values of bourgeois society, we had open commitments to the toiling people. Persons like me who came from the "upper castes" and *jenmi* families were subjected to the process of "declassification". Born and brought up in bourgeois or landlord surroundings, we became, so to say, the adopted sons (or daughters) of India's working class. That was how, having heard of "Bolshevism" in connection with the extremely modest reforms in the *jenmi*-tenant relations in the early 1920s. I developed myself as a Bolshevik and authored in 1940 a document advocating the abolition of the *jenmi* system in Malabar, and that too without compensation. Seventeen years later, heading the first elected government of the newly-formed Kerala state, I actively participated in the enactment of a legislation which, while falling far short of what I had envisaged in the 1940 document, was far ahead of what was, in the 1920s, denounced as "Bolshevism".

CHAPTER 2

A CENTURY AND A HALF OF RADICAL SOCIAL CHANGES

1989 WILL BE OBSERVED BY THE WRITERS AND LITERARY critics of Kerala as the centenary year of the publication of the first significant social novel in Malayalam, *Indulekha*, by O. Chandu Menon, which made a realistic appraisal of high class (caste) society in Kerala, exposed the decadence of the joint family setup of two types—the patriarchal Namboodiri and the matriarchal Nair. The conflicts between the uneducated but rich Namboodiri *jenmi* and his betteroff Nair tenant, between the conservative elderly uncle and the more independent-minded niece in the Nair families having to marry off their women to Namboodiri men—these are portrayed in the novel which, in fact, was a call for revolt against the then prevailing social order but confined to the two highest castes in Kerala, the Namboodiri and the Nair.

Chandu Menon, the novelist, was by caste a Nair. He represented the new urges among his caste fellows who, influenced by the new ideas of capitalist society and benefitting from the modern education and employment under the British Government (Menon himself was a judicial officer), rebelled against the caste and *jenmi* domination which condemned them to the whims and vagaries of uncultured Namboodiri overlords. The spirit of revolt against the Nair women being married off to members of Namboodiri families, against the practically illiterate *jenmi* Namboodiri lording it over the educated and well employed tenant (Nair), permeated the whole story.

Almost two decades after *Indulekha*, a lyrical poetical work appeared under the title *Fallen Flower*. Not only was its content new but its author belonged to a caste whose members were deemed to pollute high-caste people if they came closer than 24 feet. Unlike *Indulekha*, the new poem did not carry any direct message of revolt against the existing social order but the genre of literature which its author Kumaran Asan, introduced for the first time in the history of Malayalam literature made him recognised as a literary genius. The poet and his creation were introduced to the Malayalam readers by a scion of the Travancore royal family who praised Asan as nobody else at the time could.

Let it be added that, before making his mark as a talented poet, Asan had started working as the general secretary of an organisation formed to protect the interests of downtrodden castes like his own, i.e., Ezhava. Each of his works, beginning with the *Fallen Flower*, was a departure from, a revolt against the type of decadent literature—works bordering on pornography. Relying on the Buddhist rather than the Hindu lore for most of his lyrical poems in which he portrayed "lustless love', he ended up with a poem (*Duravastha*) in which he suggested the marriage of a Namboodiri girl with an untouchable boy.

These, however, were not isolated developments confined to Kerala. They had been preceded by the renaissance in Bengal to which a dynamic leadership was given by Ram Mohun Roy (1774-1833) and his contemporaries. Having had to their credit the solid achievement of the abolition of *Sati*, a few widow remarriages, etc., they are deservedly called the torch-bearers of the social reform movement in India. Closely followed by Jyotiba Phule and others in Maharashtra, the example set by the Bengal social reformers was followed in Kerala. Chandu Menon, in his *Indulekha*, not only advocated social reforms of this type but showed his sympathies for the Indian National Congress (formed four years before the publication of his novel), indicating that the new bourgeois intelligentsia was opting for socio-cultural and political changes unthinkable for the conservatives of those days.

Many of the changes envisaged by the new bourgeois

intelligentsia had already gone very far before I was born. The publication of *Indulekha* preceded my birth by full two decades, and I was 13 years old when *Duravastha* appeared. In between these two dates, i.e., by the time I could start taking active interest and participate in the socio-political movements, the revolt of the Nairs had taken an organisational shape called the Nair Service Society which worked, among other things, for the breakup of the matriarchal joint family. The anti-*jenmi* revolt of tenants belonging to all castes had also gathered strength. These two movements had not only developed but achieved victories in Travancore and Cochin : a Nair Regulation Act and a Tenancy Act had come into force in the two states. Pressure for the same was building up in Malabar as well.

Far more extensive was the anti-caste movement of the Ezhavas which took inspiration originally from a Sanyasi, Sri Narayana Guru. The Swami preached his doctrine of "One Caste, One Religion, One God", and established temples, with "Ezhava Gods". With such a Swami as the patron and the poet Kumaran Asan as the General Secretary, the Ezhavas formed and functioned their own organisation. Couched though it was in religious terms, Sri Narayan Guru's was a message of self-reliance and independence, not only for his own but for all oppressed castes. Then there were leaders of other oppressed castes like Ayyankali, the Pulaya (Harijan) leader, the organiser of the first agricultural labourers' strike during the early years of the century in Travancore, and several others.

The years preceding my birth and those during which I was growing up, thus, saw developments pregnant with possibilities. It can be said without fear of contradiction that Kerala —and indeed India—was in the midst of a socio-cultural and political upheaval.

The caste and family into which I was born did not and could not escape all that was happening around. An organisation of Namboodiris, the Namboodiri Yogakshema Sabha—with the modest aim of "securing the welfare of the community", had been formed, with a first cousin of my mother as one of its tallest leaders. It was that organisation that took the initiative in founding the special school (the Namboodiri

Vidyalayam) for imparting modern education to Namboodiri boys (the education of Namboodiri girls was unthinkable) "without affecting traditional education, rituals", etc. That organisation had also started discussing the reform of the marriage and family system, i.e., permitting the younger brothers to marry Namboodiri girls (as the eldest brother did), rather than taking wives from the non-Namboodiri families; making the patriarchal Namboodiri joint family as much partible as the matriarchal Nair family, and so on.

These reforms in the family, marriage and property system attracted me as a boy in his teens. At the age of 14, in fact, I shouldered the responsibility (only a year after which I gave it up, as I was joining the school) of working as the Secretary of a local unit of the Namboodiri Yogakshema Sabha. That was my first apprenticeship in social work. Although till then I had not taken paper, pen and ink to write anything (all my education so far was reading books in three scripts), I had now to write out the notices of every meeting, record the proceedings in the book and maintain other records. Doing donkey's work and listening to the debates that were raging at the meetings of the Sabha developed my capacities as a future political activist. Although big political developments were taking place in the country and I was closely following them through the newspapers, my practical activities, were for the time being confined to the field of social reform.

My interest and growing involvement in politics which was rapidly moving to the Left, attracted me towards the Left-wing of the social reform movement. An organisation called Namboodiri Yuvajana Sangham (young men's association), with its own organ *Unni Namboodiri*, started functioning energetically. I became an activist of this organisation and took over as the Assistant Editor of the paper when I was still a college student, at the age of 21. Contributing regularly to the paper not only articles on social reforms for the particular caste but on general reforms of a bourgeois democratic character (including atheistic thought), as well as national and international issues, I developed myself as a leftist in every sense of the term—one step short of a political radical or revolutionary.

Like all other Namboodiri families of those days, ours was a patriarchal joint family when I was born and being brought up. My father (who died when I was just five and whose face I do not remember), his younger brother, father's two wives, a child-widow grandmother, and we the children of the two mothers constituted the family. It is worth noting that my step-mother (father's second wife) was the daughter of a person to whom father's younger sister was given in marriage as "exchange" for his daughter. As for our uncle (father's younger brother), he, like all other younger brothers in Namboodiri families then, had taken as his wife a lady of a respectable non-Namboodiri family. If social reforms had not intervened, my eldest brother would have married within the caste like our father—and that too more than once—and the three of us, younger brothers, would have married girls from other 'upper' caste families.

What about our aunts, the sisters of our father and uncle, and our own sisters? One of the aunts, as noted above, was married in "exchange" for her husband's daughter, the same gentleman thus becoming father-in-law and brother-in-law to our father. Two of the three remaining aunts were child-widows, their husbands having died early, after each had already given birth to a baby. Only one of them had thus a normal married life, with no other woman to share the bed with her husband. In the case of our sisters too, only one had a normal married life with no "co-wives", the others having one or even two "co-wives".

Ours, however, was not an uncommon type of family. The eldest son alone marrying within the caste, and that too more than one, that is, two or even three; the younger brothers marrying outside the caste; young bride—old bridegroom "marriages"; large numbers of child-widows—these were the rule rather than an exception among those who were considered the "highest" in the caste hierarchy. The joint family system, lack of modern education, theoretical and practical prohibition on doing some job to earn a living—these constituted the essence of decadence to which the entire caste had become victim. This gave rise to a cultural milieu in which enjoyment in and production of pornographic literature became the pastime of the

"enlightened" members of the caste. It was against this background that radical ideas and movements gripped the younger generation; I was naturally influenced by these ideas and movements when I was in my teens.

The younger generations in other castes and communities were also influenced by similar radical ideas and movements. Social reforms within all castes and communities led many in these castes and communities to revolt against caste as such, for intercaste marriages, etc. Kumaran Asan's *Duravastha*, it will be recalled, was a call for intercaste marriages between men and women belonging to the "highest" and "lowest" castes. Some of the followers and disciples of Asan broke with their mentor, a deeply religious man, and initiated the atheistic-rationalistic movement. The latter half of the twenties saw an upsurge of socio-cultural revolt against all that was decadent in the prevailing social order. I, too, as an activist in the Namboodiri Yuvajana Sangham and as Assistant Editor of the *Unni Namboodiri*, made my modest contributions to the dissemination of these radical ideas.

The radical ideas and movements, however, would not have developed into socialism and communism had it not been for the big national-political upsurge that was sweeping the country. The dissemination of radical ideas and the rise of social reform movements leading to intercaste marriages and atheistic rationalism did, in fact, synchronise with the enormous growth of the freedom movement and the emergence of definite Left groups (including socialists and communists) within the freedom movement. The two streams—socio-cultural and political movements—supplemented and supported each other. It is, therefore, proposed in this book to trace the development of the two streams which together precipitated the Communist movement and helped the evolution of individuals like me into communists. Before proceeding to narrate that story, however, let me look back at the changes that overtook my family since I awakened myself to socio-political consciousness and started working for social change.

The joint family into which I was born exists no more. The property was partitioned, each of us brothers setting up his separate family. While my brothers used their share of

property for making their living, I proceeded, after a time, to sell it and use the proceeds as capital for our Party Press. I have since then been living and maintaining my wife and children with what I get from the Party and from the royalty for my books. Though my family has at times undergone hardships (particularly when I had to remain underground), it has been looked after with the children well-educated. All the four children and their spouses are employed. The transformation of my *jenmi* family into a working middle class family is thus complete. This, with important variations, is true of almost all families belonging to this caste/community. Working by hand or brain has become the rule rather than the exception for the generation next to ours.

This is due to two major legislations—one enacted in the thirties, and the other in the fifties and sixties. The former provided for the abolition of polygamy, for widow remarriage, equal right to family property for all (male and female) members of the family, partition of the till-then-indivisible joint family property, etc. The latter was the Agrarian Relations Bill introduced by the first Communist Government in 1957 and finalised in 1969 by the CPI (M)-led United Front Government. The two legislations together put an end to the socio-economic uniqueness of the Namboodiris as a caste/community, reducing it by and large to the position of any other caste/communal group.

Similar changes have taken place in all caste/communal groups which it is not proposed to explain here, as they are not directly related to my evolution as a political activist. It is, however, necessary to mention the fact that intercaste marriages —one of the spouses being a Namboodiri by birth—are now not uncommon. The reason is that men and women belonging to different castes get acquainted at their work places, develop intimacy and decide to marry. This was not possible a few decades ago, since neither boys nor girls belonging to the Namboodiri caste/communal group used to get educated for a profession. Arranged marriages with all the handicaps they involve, or enforced bachelor/spinster life, added to the promiscuous sex life for the men was, therefore, the lot of every individual. Now that both boys and girls get educated and qualify for a

profession, they get jobs either in Kerala itself or outside, get plenty of opportunity to meet girl or boy friends in the workplace. That is why intercaste marriages have become and are becoming more and more common.

My adolescent and adult life has thus been full of epoch-making changes in the socio-cultural life of my home state, Kerala. Supplementing and supporting them was the big political upsurge which, starting in north India, swept Kerala from the twenties of this century. I became the joint product of these two mainstreams, but subsequently became an active agent in developing a new all-embracing revolutionary movement—in Kerala and outside.

CHAPTER 3

INDIAN (AND KERALA) POLITICS IN THE EARLY TWENTIES

THE FIRST POLITICAL READING I HAD WAS OF three small booklets—biographies of Gokhale, Tilak and Gandhi—by an author who was the first secretary of the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee (1920-21). The countrywide mass political movement, headed by Gandhi, under the joint auspices of the reorganised Indian National Congress and the newly-formed Khilafat Committee had attracted me. I wanted to acquaint myself with the movement and, therefore, avidly read all that was then coming out in Malayalam. Barring the monthly, bi-weekly and weekly journals, (there being no dailies in Malayalam), the only material then available was this set of three booklets.

The author was not only the first secretary of the newly-formed Kerala Provincial Congress Committee but subsequently became the founder-editor of *Mathrubhumi* which appeared first as a tri-weekly and then developed into a daily. Although called Kerala Provincial Committee, it was virtually a Malabar District Congress Committee, of which the gentleman concerned, K.P. Kesava Menon, was in charge.

A Malabar District Committee had, in fact, come into existence and held its conferences after the end of the First World War. It was then under the Madras Presidency organisation of the National Congress. The Congress Constitution adopted under Gandhi's leadership provided for linguistic provinces as the basis of the Congress organisation. It was, therefore, neces-

sary to have separate committees for the four linguistic divisions of the then Madras Presidency. The princely states, parts of all the four linguistic states, however, were outside the newly-demarcated Congress provinces, since it was a policy of the Congress to refrain from "intervening in the internal politics" of princely states. The erstwhile Malabar District Congress Committee was, therefore, converted into the newly-formed Kerala Provincial Committee. The author of the three biographical pamphlets with which my political education began, was the first secretary of this Provincial Committee.

The first provincial political conference under the auspices of this new Committee was held at Ottapalam, a small township in my home Taluk of Walluvanad. Quite a few of my neighbours and acquaintances attended the conference. The eye-witness accounts given by them and the reports that appeared in Malayalam papers then available, broadened my political vision. This, in fact, preceded the conference of the caste organisation, the Namboodiri Yogakshema Sabha which I later attended regularly for a decade. National political consciousness, in other words, was inseparable from the aspirations of social reform ; both together making me a dedicated public activist in later years.

Although not a direct participant in the Ottapalam conference, I was moved by the developments there Gandhi's call for "one-crore rupees for the Tilak Swaraj Fund and one crore of Charkhas", as the conditions for obtaining "Swaraj in one year", inspired me. I was moved by the sight of Congressmen and Khilafatists working shoulder to shoulder to make "Swaraj in one year" a reality. When some of them visited us and were selling the "Swaraj rupee" (the receipt for donations to the Tilak Swaraj Fund), I bought one and kept it safely for several years.

The enthusiasm with which I welcomed the new mass upsurge, however, was washed away in a few months. The Hindu-Muslim unity symbolised in the Non-Cooperation-Khilafat movement, was broken when the bourgeois liberalism of the Congress leaders and the Islamic fundamentalism of the Khilafatists together transformed the secular democratic movement into the "Moplah rebellion". This development affected

our family directly. Situated as our home was in the "rebellion-affected" belt, all of us except the two elder brothers who were studying in the special *Namboodiri Vidyalayam* in Trichur, had to go out, stay with our paternal cousin and his mother for six months. Only after the "rebellion" was suppressed under strict martial law did we return home.

This indeed was a shattering blow to the hopes with which I had welcomed the national political movement led by Gandhi, who was slowly becoming the Mahatma, giving up his earlier and more respectable clothes for the loin cloth. Reports of what were happening in the "rebellion-affected" Malabar, as well as in distant north India, raised doubts as to whether the ideals of Hindu-Muslim unity, non-violent mass action, etc., were at all attainable.

This, however, was a temporary phase. My faith in the reorganised Congress which had not only an inspiring goal but also a concrete plan of action—what is called the "constructive programme" Khadi, Hindi, abolition of untouchability, etc.—strengthened my conviction that whatever the difficulties created by the "Moplah rebellion", the path chosen by the Congress under Gandhi was the only correct one. It was, in fact, in those days that I began wearing Khadi and learning Hindi. (The former I gave up only after two decades, while the latter I continued enough to be able to read Hindi papers, though not able to speak the language.) I was a regular reader of the *Mathrubhumi* since its inception as a tri-weekly and keenly observed all that was happening in the Congress.

One reason for this continuing faith in the Congress was that, though crisis-ridden in several ways (with a serious split between the "Swarajists" and "No-changers", Gandhists and revolutionaries, Hindu and Muslim Congressmen, etc.), there were some activities being undertaken by the Congressmen. The electoral activities of the Swarajists, the constructive programme of the no-changers, the periodical conferences and meetings, the publication of journals and booklets, etc., kept Congressmen and their sympathisers employed. The starting of some *Ashrams* where untouchable (later called *Harijan*) boys and girls were lodged and educated under the leadership of Kelappan in the north and Krishna Swami Iyer in the south of Malabar etc.

roused all progressives and radicals bringing them closer to the Congress. The several month-long Temple Road Satyagraha in Vaikom (action to secure for the untouchables the right to walk along the roads adjoining the temple) in Travancore attracted all-India attention, Mahatma Gandhi himself visiting Vaikom and helping the Satyagrahis.

Developments mentioned here are, of course, part of what was happening all over India. The Non-Cooperation-Khilafat movement which was to have enabled the nation to secure "Swaraj in one year" was not suppressed as the "Moplah rebellion" was. Gandhi himself confessed to having committed a "Himalayan blunder" when the rural poor of a village in U.P. (Chauri Chaura) went beyond the limits of non-violence set by him and retaliated against the police. He withdrew the programme of "non-violent resistance". Many former activists and leaders of the Non-Cooperation Movement and champions of Hindu-Muslim unity became the organisers of Hindu or Muslim communal organisations. Cow slaughter, playing of music before mosque, conversion and reconversion, etc., became explosive issues leading to hundreds being slaughtered. The Mahatma himself had to go on a "self-purifying fast" to reforge Hindu-Muslim unity.

These and other all-India political developments, however, do not form part of my direct activity; I was only a distant, though interested, witness to them. Some of these all-India political developments will have to be mentioned in a subsequent chapter, since they helped in shaping the Kerala politics of the thirties which formed part of my own life.

It should. however, be noted that, although the Gandhi-led Congress deliberately adopted the policy of "non-interference in the internal affairs of princely states", people in Cochin and Travancore were also roused to militant action. The days of the Non-Cooperation-Khilafat movement had roused the student community in Trivandrum against whom a brutal lathi charge was made by the police. Had it not been for the Congress policy of "non-interference", this and other militant actions would have changed the political situation in Travancore and Cochin. Progressive democratic sections of the people, however, did not remain idle. Apart from participating in the

"constructive programme", which was not prohibited in the princely states, some of them took the initiative in convening states people's conferences and raising the demand for responsible government. Though it took more than a decade for this trend to take the definite shape of an organisation (Travancore State and Cochin Congresses), its beginnings could be seen in it.

One of the Congress activists of the "constructive programme" in Cochin state was a first cousin of my mother who, as a school student when Gandhi gave the call for the "triple boycott" (boycott of schools being one of the three), had given up studies and become an active and full-time Congressman. After the suppression of the "Moplah rebellion" and the virtual disintegration of the Congress in Kerala, he carried on his "constructive programme" activities. One of the founders of *Mathrubhumi*, he also edited for a few months a monthly journal, *Lokmanya*. For an editorial published in the journal, he and one of his colleagues in the paper were arrested and convicted for six months.

Having served his term, he came out of jail but a bigger punishment was awaiting him: since he mixed with "lower-caste" people in jail, sharing food with them, the community decreed him to be an "outcaste". Progressive sections within the community, however, decided to fight back. They said that he could be "purified" if only he submits himself to certain rigorous life conduct (*prayaschitta*) for a few days. This having been done properly, he was declared "purified". This, however, was not accepted by the conservatives in the community who continued to treat him as an "outcaste". Furious and prolonged battles were fought for several months between the two groups before the dust raised by the *prayaschitta* could settle down.

Another Namboodiri who was arrested following the "Moplah rebellion" was less fortunate. Unlike my mother's cousin who had relatives among the richest in the community, this gentleman was of a relatively "lower order". Nobody took the initiative for organising the *prayaschitta* and fighting the battle for him against the conservatives. Some of us in the "left wing" of the social reform movement, therefore, had to

take the initiative and organise the *prayaschitta*, but olny after seven or eight years.

Let me anticipate a little. I too had subsequently the experience of double punishment for a Namboodiri who "loses caste" for participating in the freedom movement and getting imprisoned. Along with four or five others (one of whom happened to be my classmate, a half-brother of the gentleman whose *prayaschitta* had created a furore), I participated in the freedom movement in 1932. Convicted for a three year term but released after a year and seven months, the question posed itself before me : shall I do *prayaschitta*, as two of my elderly friends had done ? I decided : 'no'—a decision endorsed by the others who participated in the movement. My mother understood me, so I was not treated in my own family as an 'outcaste'.

For a few years, of course, I had to suffer from being considered in some circles as an 'outcaste'. That phase, however, was over before long, the majority of those concerned (kinsmen, relatives, acquaintances in the community) treating me on equal terms with those who have preserved the caste status. Though mother was worried as to whether, under these conditions, any respectable family in the community would offer the hand of a girl as my bride, she stood with me in my determination that, come what may, I would not humiliate myself by doing *prayaschitta* for having done the right thing for the country and its people. Actually, however, the head of a highly respectable family in Travancore (intimate with the Maharaja) offered me the hand of his younger sister whom I married.

Similar, though not identical, was the experience of my friends/comrades who participated in the 1932 Civil Disobedience Movement. None of them did *prayaschitta* and after some time, they were considered by the community as not having "lost the caste". All these cases of jail-going and *prayaschitta* show the intimate connection between political consciousness and activity, on the one hand, and social conservatism and progressivism, on the other. My generation of the "highestcaste" patriots had to defy a backward-looking community to defy the alien political authority. It is a matter of satisfaction for my generaton that we defied both, thereby preparing the soil for that

integrated revolutionary development which, in course of time, led to the birth of the Communist Party in Kerala.

I cannot close this chapter without mentioning the name of one who put the indelible mark of his personality on me. His name is M.P. Narayana Menon, a practising lawyer in the small town of Perintalmanna, the headquarters of our home taluk Walluvanad. Arrested in 1921 and tried for "waging war against the King Emperor", he was awarded life imprisonment. He was offered release if only he tendered an apology. Rejecting the advice, even request, of innumerable friends and relatives, he preferred to continue in jail till he completed the term (of 20 years minus the normal remissions) in 1934. That was a model for us young men to follow.

It was, therefore, a matter of great pleasure for me to find, on joining school in 1925, that his younger brother Govinda Menon was one of our teachers and that a younger brother of Mrs. Menon was a classmate of mine, while other relatives (including Menon's daughter and a son) were in the higher or lower classes in the same school. It was a matter of still greater pleasure and privilege for me subsequently to spend a year and a half in jail with him (in 1932-33). I came to respect him not only as a patriot who did not lower the flag of freedom struggle but also a scholar of high order. Ever since then, right up to his death, I held him in high respect and esteem, while I could feel the affection with which he treated me.

CHAPTER 4

THE CONGRESS AND THE LEFT

I AM MAKING A SLIGHT DIGRESSION FROM personal reminiscences proper, narrating developments of which the sources of my knowledge are secondary, rather than direct. Some of these developments, in fact, took place even before I was born. Most of them date back to the years when I was in the process of acquiring political consciousness. As for the rest, a very small proportion of those which are narrated were taking place when I was growing into a political being but beyond the fields familiar to me. All of them, however, have their relevance in my reminiscences in that they shaped my growth from a social reformer to a freedom fighter, from the latter to a radical Congressman, then a socialist and finally a communist. They are part of the history of India's freedom movement which I have traced in a separate volume. What is attempted here is a description of the role they played in moulding my political personality.

The Indian National Congress, as is known, was formed in 1885. That was 24 years before I was born. As opposed to the first generation of Congressmen who functioned as "the loyal subjects of His Majesty the King Emperor" and as such petitioned the authorities for administrative and constitutional reforms, the second generation advanced a militant programme of Swadeshi, national education and national language. With the central slogan "Swaraj is my birth right; I shall have it", this generation brought about a remarkable change in Congress politics—"From mendicancy to militancy". Together with a

horizontal and vertical split within the Congress which followed, and the emergence of a large number of revolutionary action groups (slanderously called "terrorists") all over the country, this heralded the rise of a definite left trend in the Congress (and, in general, national politics).

Not only did these developments predate my birth, they did not have any direct impact on Kerala. As part of the Madras Presidency, the few professionals and intellectuals who were living and working in the provincial capital did, of course, participate in Congress activities; one of them, C. Sankaran Nair, was even elected Congress President for one session. There was, however, no Congress organisation in Malabar, the only district in Madras with Malayalam-speaking population. The Congress as an organisation and the Malabar part of present-day Kerala were thus strangers to each other. The beginnings of a change in the situation could be seen only when Mrs. Anne Besant and her group of theosophists organised the Home Rule League in the war years and the theosophists in Malabar started organising themselves politically. This, however, was in days immediately preceding the launching of the Non-Cooperation-Khilafat movement led by Mahatma Gandhi and his colleagues.

National (and Congress) politics had in the meanwhile undergone big changes. The radical trend represented by militant leaders like Lokmanya Tilak and the revolutionary action groups had, in the years of the First World War, inspired groups of revolutionaries abroad to attempt a revolution in India with the help of Britain's imperialist rivals. The attempt proved abortive but had its lasting impact by way of radicalising the masses. This was what gave birth to the post-war upsurge of mass militancy which was channelised into the movement of non-violent non-cooperation initiated and led by Gandhi. The earlier militants were pushed to the background by Gandhi who succeeded (as nobody else did till then) in mobilising the rural masses, giving tongue to the long-suppressed toilers who were now worshipped as *Daridra Narayana* It was in this form that the Congress penetrated the hearts of the people in Kerala. It was this that brought me into politics.

While basically national, the Gandhi-led mass movement had its international aspect as well. For the Muslim masses who

rallied to the call of the Khilafat, it was a protest against the injustice done to the Turkish caliph. For the rest of the nation, it was directed against a ruling power which had gone back on every promise made during the war. Although extremely weak, there was also the impact of the Russian Revolution of 1917, an event which was hailed by such militant national political leaders as Tilak and savants like Tagore. The combined result of all these was the rapid maturing of a militant mass movement directed against British rule—a movement which embraced all classes and strata of Indian society ; a movement within which crystalisation was taking place between the right and the left, between the working people and the owning classes.

Going back to the pre-war years, one has to note that, while the freedom movement—both the right (liberal) and left (militant) leadership—was, in its outlook and programmes, of a bourgeois character, fighting for a bourgeois democratic political set up in India after the attainment of Swaraj ; the working class which was being awakened to national consciousness was increasingly rallying itself behind the Swaraj movement. The Bombay working class going on a three-day strike in protest in 1908 against the barbarous punishment awarded by the British court to the Lokmanya was significant enough to be noted by no less a person than Lenin who wrote :

> In India, the street is standing up for its writers and political leaders. The infamous sentence pronounced by the British jackals on the Indian democrat Tilak.....evoked street demonstration and strike in Bombay.

The Bombay strike, however, was for one thing, a solitary instance, not a general trend. For another, it was a political action in which the working class was rallied under the banner of bourgeois democracy. In the post-war upsurge, however, the working class responded to the call of non-cooperation in a far more extensive manner. Mill, factory and plantation workers went on strike which continued for days together. Furthermore, this class was getting organised on its own class (economic) demands and forming its own organisation, the trade unions. The setting up of an all-India organisation of the working class (the All-India Trade Union Congress) was a historic development, though it had very serious limitations flowing out of the

ideology and practices of bourgeois liberal trade unionism.

The force which is capable of overcoming the limitations of bourgeois liberal trade unionism was, however, making its appearance. The reference is to the scattered groups of communists who had started springing up all over the country and were trying to coordinate their activities under the leadership of the Communist International. The British rulers could see that this was, for them, a far more serious danger than either the Gandhi-led Congress or the revolutionary action groups whom they called "terrorists". For, here was a force directly connected with the international revolutionary movement and which had a programme of rallying the very same *Daridra Narayana* on whom Gandhi was relying, but on a revolutionary basis rather than on the Gandhian strategy of negotiated settlement with the British rulers. They, therefore, unleashed the most cruel methods for suppressing the communists. They launched three anti-communist conspiracy cases (Peshawar 1922, Kanpur 1924 and Meerut 1929) at the all-India level and innumerable other prosecutions on a local scale against the communists. These, however, helped the ideas of communism percolate to the thinking sections of the people. In orther words, though effective in preventing the consolidation of scattered communist groups into an organised communist party, repression could not stop the advance of the ideology and movement of communism.

This was reflected in a few qualitative changes in the character of the Congress left. Firstly, as opposed to the revolutionary action groups with their cult of the bomb in which the individual revolutionary is the actor, the new left was relying on the militancy of the masses. Secondly, and as a derivative of the first, the new left paid attention to the task of organising the workers, peasants and other sections of the common people in their trade unions, Kisan Sabhas, etc.—organisations in which Congressmen worked with other leftists, including the communists. Thirdly and above all, the objective of the Congress was being sought to be defined as complete independence from and total severance of all connection with the British Empire.

This latter became the central issue on which the new left crossed swords with the right. Half a decade of internal struggle

ensued before the Madras session of the Congress (1927) declared independence as the national objective. Still another two years elapsed before the Congress decided to launch a country-wide mass struggle to realise the objective.

As the freedom movement and the Congress in general, so the left movement too, came to Kerala later than elsewhere. Neither the militant nationalism of the Lokmanya and his colleagues nor revolutionary action groups which sprouted and grew in the rest of India in the early years of the century had any roots here. As for the Gandhi-led mass movement, it did influence the people for a couple of years, and continued to sway a section of the intelligentsia from among whose ranks grew a contingent of dedicated cadres. Those who kept the flag of nationalism flying, however, were either the Khadi-Hindi-Ashram*walas*, the so called "constructive" workers, or those who engaged themselves in electioneering. It was only towards the end of the twenties, when the heated debate on Complete Independence versus Dominion Status raged all over the country, that Congressmen in the Malabar part of Kerala got affected.

This is the phase of the history of the freedom movement when I came to be drawn towards political activity. I was then in my teens and a school boy. My first exposure to national politics was at the 1927 session of the Congress held in Madras at which the historic resolution on Complete Independence as opposed to Dominion Status was hotly debated. For the first time in my life, I went round the Congress Nagar, saw the various stalls and shops, mingled with the multi-lingual, multi-costumed crowd that is the people of India, and sat through the session. I cannot claim to have fully followed the speeches delivered for and against the main resolution ; my knowledge of English as well as the political content of the arguments advanced by either side was inadequate for it. I, however, felt the political environment of the debate, saw many distinguished individuals whose names I had read in papers. I came back from Madras a convinced independence-*wala*.

One important change that this brought about in me was that the Mahatma was no more the single political idol for me to worship. Bracketed with him was Jawaharlal Nehru, the

mover of the Independence resolution. It was, therefore, a matter of good fortune for me, and many like me, that Nehru was coming to Kerala for presiding over the Provincial Political Conference. Although the Madras session had declared Complete Independence to be the ultimate objective, it had not been made part of the Congress plan of immediate action. Furthermore, the adverse comment on the Madras session made by the Mahatma—that it was "a school boys' debate"—had encouraged the opponents of Complete Independence. The conference, therefore, was the arena of a fierce battle of wits in which no holds were barred. The debate being conducted in Malayalam, I could follow every word said by the spokesmen of the two sides. One of the side-shows of the conference—the youth Congress—was impressive in the sense that the speeches delivered and the resolutions adopted integrated political with socio-cultural radicalism.

Although, with that political conference, the left trend in all-India politics started penetrating the Congress in Kerala, the dominant leadership of the organisation in Kerala adopted an attitude hostile to any mass struggle in Malabar. The argument was that, in view of what happened to the Non-Cooperation-Khilafat Movement, it would be dangerous to start a movement in Malabar with its volatile Moplah population. The leadership of the KPCC in fact, suggested that the all-India decision to start the Salt Satyagraha (1930) should not be applied here. This, however, was hotly opposed by a section of the Gandhian leadership headed by Kelappan who had the powerful support of the younger and more radical section. The crucial debate in the KPCC meeting held for the purpose culminated in the decision to have the Satyagraha in Malabar as well. The victory won in this serious political battle was the beginning of a definite left movement in Kerala : the radical youth who stood for Complete Independence and ardently participated in the struggle came in confrontation with the conservative leaders who were afraid of mass struggle.

CHAPTER 5

EDUCATION IN SCHOOL AND PUBLIC LIFE

IN JUNE 1925, I JOINED THE SCHOOL. MY BROTHER (the son of our father's second wife while I am the first wife's son) was also admitted to the same class. Since neither of us had any previous school education (both of us were being taught by a private tutor), the headmaster conducted a special test in English and elementary mathematics. Though he found me fit enough to be admitted to the fourth form, he had both of us admitted to the third form. From then, for four years—till I passed and my brother failed in the secondary school leaving certificate examination in March 1929—we were together in the school.

That was a new experience for both of us, particularly for me because, unlike me, my brother had spent a few months in the special Namboodiri Vidyalayam where, though in particularly orthodox Namboodiri atmosphere, he listened to the teacher's lectures in the classroom. My case was different because, till I started being taught by a private tutor, I never had any experience of subjects like Elementary Mathematics, History, Geography and, above all, English. I, however, had the advantage which few among my classmates (including my brother) had : with the rigorous discipline of Sanskrit study which I had, the intensive study of English (grammer and composition) as well as other subjects under the private tutor had made it easy for me to acclimatise myself with the new academic atmosphere into which I was suddenly lifted. As a matter of fact, in the first few days of being admitted, my record as "a bright student" was established.

The environment in the school was new for both of us in another sense. For the first time in our lives, we were being uprooted from the Namboodiri (high caste-cum-*jenmi*) friends and relatives, put among boys belonging to various castes which we at home had been trained to look upon as "lower than us". Many of them, in fact, were contemptuous of and made sneering remarks about us, since the socio-cultural backwardness from which the community suffered had made it the butt of ridicule. That, however, was a passing phenomenon ; the free and friendly contacts we established with our classmates broke all the earlier barriers between us and the other boys. Added to it was my academic record. The three years I spent in my first school—a District Board School in the headquarters town of the *taluk*—gave me the first lesson of cooperative social endeavour cutting across caste, communal and other barriers.

A few words about the state of education and society in those days, as seen in the composition of the students and teachers in our school. Although the school was mixed, admitting boys and girls in every class, there was not a single girl in our class nor in any of the three higher classes. Two or three girls in the two classes lower than ours was all that the womenfolk had as their share of the student population in the six highest classes in that school. Even these, let it be noted, were Hindu girls. The proportion of Muslims even among the boys was miniscule (our class with 29 or 30 boys had just three Muslims) in that Muslim majority area. Depressed Class (they had not been "promoted" into "Harijans" or even as "scheduled castes") boys were rare (none in our class). The Tamil Brahmin (Iyer), Nair and Tiyya boys constituted the majority. The four Namboodiri boys (including two of us) were only the first generation of members of the community to take to modern school education along with boys from all castes. Among the teachers, too, the same situation prevailed.

We happened to join the school in its Diamond Jubilee year. I did not have the opportunity to physically participate in the celebrations since I was down with malaria. I, however, heard about it from friends, including my brother. Over four decades later, I had the opportunity to participate in the cen-

tenary celebrations of the school. What a contrast ! While in our days no class in the middle and high school sections had to be divided into A, B, etc., I was told that every class had two and even more divisions at the time of the centenary. There was enormous increase also in the proportion of girls, Muslim and Harijan boys, etc. Quite some change since my time !

I have already noted that one of my teachers was the brother of M.P. Narayana Menon, the courageous freedom fighter, about whom much was being written in the papers. He, i.e., Govinda Menon, happened to be our class teacher for two successive years. He encouraged me a lot, both in my class studies as well as in my political understanding. I respected him both as our teacher and as a patriotic gentleman, while he was considerate towards me both as a "bright student" and as a budding politician of the Congress movement. He subsequently gave up teaching, went to Madras and came back with a diploma in law to set up practice. After starting practice as a lawyer, he became an active Congress leader with whom I worked as a Congressman of the *taluk*. Later on, however, we stood on opposite sides—he a Congressman, and I a communist. We were rival candidates in 1946 the first election in which the Communist Party put up its own candidates.

Two incidents connected with my career in my first school are worth mentioning. Firstly, while I was in the third form, I lost several weeks since I was down with malaria. I could not sit for the annual examination. I was worried whether I would have to sit in the same class again. The headmaster, however, knew my worth as a student ; he had originally thought of admitting me in the fourth form. He was kind enough to visit our home in order to assure me that I would be promoted.

The second incident concerned the choice of the optional subject on entering the fifth form. Either mathematics or history —these were the groups out of which one had to choose. All the "bright boys" were supposed to choose mathematics. Being one of that category, I was expected to opt for that group. I, however, preferred history. Nobody—neither the boys nor the teachers—would believe it. Terrific pressure was put on me to change the group. I, however, stuck to my decision which I have never regretted.

Why did I choose history? Because my little acquaintance with the social reform movement and with the Congress activities had led me to the conclusion that I should develop myself as a public worker. Reform of the customs and manners of highcaste Hindu society and the struggle for the country's freedom, became the two passions which moved me. Since I had to equip myself for work in this direction, I decided that those subjects which help me in this should be my optional subjects. Our teacher Govinda Menon's classes (in English and history) strengthened my conviction.

I may illustrate this by the title and content of the first article of mine to appear in the organ of the Namboodiri Yogakshema Sabha. The title was "The French Revolution and the Namboodiri community". The inspiration for it came from the story of the French Revolution that I learnt in the fourth form. The content was an explanation of the revolution in general—"root and branch change in society"—which the French Revolution was and the topicality of such "root and branch change" reforms in the Namboodiri community. The article is perhaps indicative of the way in which my thinking in 1926-27 was shaping itself: though still in its initial stages, my consciousness was developing in an allsidedness, encompassing the socio-cultural, economic and political changes; in other words, I was taking the first steps towards the revolutionary transformation of my thinking and personality.

Encouraged by the publication of the article and a few letters of congratulations from friends, I started writing regularly for the paper—mostly on problems of social reform and in a polemical way. I was, in other words, involving myself in heated debates on a number of problems between the relatively moderate and radical sections in the reform movement. This and the regular attendance at the annual meeting of the two organisations—the youths' and the general—constituted my personal participation in the movement.

New avenues of public activity, however, were open in my school itself. Apart from the extra-curricular activities of the school like the debating society and sports (in which I was not an active participant but an interested observer), there was a manuscript magazine run by a group of boys to which I used to

contribute. There was, besides, a public library and reading room organised by a few spirited teachers in the school. One of them had, in fact, been transferred from north Malabar from where he brought the message of freedom struggle. I became a regular visitor to the reading room. The books and *The Hindu* paper which came to the library, together with the discussions that used to take place in the library, broadened my political vision and deepened my understanding. Although the said teacher belonged to the elementary section of the school and did not teach me in the class, I owe to him a great deal as the one who helped in familiarising myself with the intricacies of politics.

My attendance at the Madras session of the Congress has already been noted. That was when I was in the fifth form. Following the adoption of the Complete Independence resolution at the session, there was a countrywide movement for boycott of the Simon Commission which was visiting India to examine the extent to which India was ripe for being conferred greater responsibility in the administration. A two-member team of the Provincial Congress Committee was on a visit to our town. A meeting was held where the situation was explained. The two leaders (of whom one was the first cousin of my mother, referred to in the preceding pages) stayed for the night at the lodge where we were staying. They set me to work on translating the boycott resolution from English to Malayalam, my first work as a participant in the freedom movement.

Following this, a few students, including me, held a meeting and decided to absent ourselves from the classes on the day of the boycott. At the last moment, however, I developed cold feet and attended the classes—a decision which I have always regretted. A few others—numbering less than a dozen—did absent themselves from the classes, as had originally been decided. Our town and our school thus became part of the national mainstream, though I myself was not bold enough to join my friends in the boycott.

For the next school year (1928-29) when we were to join the final year class of the school, we shifted ourselves to the larger town of Palghat. Our high school section was part of a fullfledged college with four classes—two intermediate and two B.A. Here for the first time, I saw a hostel, though we ourselves were

staying in a separate lodge. Acquaintance with college boys (including the three in our own lodge), visits to the hostel, friendly exchanges with senior boys, witnessing sports and games —these broadened my vision far beyond what would have been possible in the small *Taluk* town with only a high school. Far more valuable from my point of view was that the three senior college boys who were staying in our lodge, were far more knowledgeable both in social reforms as well as national politics. Daily discussions on all developments helped me to get a correct view of both sets of problems—social reforms and national politics.

That was a year of great importance in national politics. Mahatma Gandhi trying to direct the energies of political activists to the constructive programme; the elder (Motilal) Nehru, an ardent advocate of Dominion Status; the younger (Jawaharlal) the leader of Independence *walas*; brutal lathicharge on, followed by the death of Lala Lajpat Rai; Bhagat Singh and his comrades throwing a bomb in the Central Legislative Assembly and the Lahore Conspiracy Case that followed; the countrywide arrests of communists (alleged as well as real) followed by the launching of the Meerut Communist Conspiracy Case—these were the historic developments that agitated us all. It took me some time and further study to distinguish between the Lahore and Meerut Conspiracy Cases, but I came to know that both were connected with people who were opposed to Gandhi's programme of action and that Nehru had some sympathy for them, though he was in a way a disciple of Gandhi.

One incident that took place in the year was the visit to Palghat of a two-member team consisting of Rajagopalachari and Jamanalal Bajaj, the leaders of the Hindi Prachar Sub-committee of the Congress. Some of us college and school boys who wanted to see them, requested the principal of the college (an Englishman who was the formal head of the high school as well) to permit the leaders to come to the college and address the students. The principal not only refused permission but made sneering remarks about Hindi. This made a dozen of us still more determined and we walked to the Sabari Ashram of Krishnaswamy Iyer where the leaders were staying. We met them and

explained to the leaders what had happened. Their response was to advise us to be still more determined in carrying out Hindi propogation and other items of the constructive programme.

Before I conclude the reminiscenses of my school days, it will be appropriate to mention an important change in my attitude to life. Brought up as I was in our environment, I had developed myself in my early life as a devout Hindu. Even the social reform movement of which I was a participant was calculated to reform society within the framework of Hinduism. I read a lot about Swami Vivekananda and his works in translation. Our tutor in my pre-school days was an ardent follower of the Swami. I, therefore, had some inclinations towards Hindu Mahasabha whose leaders Pandit Malaviya and Dr.Munje had made a visit to Kerala. Gradually, however, I was attracted towards the preachings of Ramaswami Naicker in Tamil Nadu and the group of rationalists in Kerala who subsequently launched a Malayalam organ of their own under the title *Yuktivadi* (the Rationalist). These contacts and the logic of the left in social reform and national movements made me completely break off from the earlier religious ideology. I was coming out of the school as a radical in the social, political and ideological terms.

CHAPTER 6

INTO THE WIDER WORLD OF PUBLIC WORK

HAVING PASSED THE SCHOOL FINAL EXAMINATION in 1929, the question arose whether I should at all continue my studies or help in managing the family properties which were in quite an unsatisfactory state. It was finally decided that I would join college and continue studies on the condition that I would come home in the weekends and help in looking after family affairs.

The next question was where I should join a college—Palghat or Trichur. I chose the latter because that town was the centre of the Namboodiri Yogakshema Sabha and the Yuvajana Sangham. The latter was about to convert its monthly organ, *Unni Namboodiri*, into a weekly. With the experience that I had gathered during the last two years, I could actively participate in the work of the radical group in the social reform movement in various ways, including regular contributions to participate in the work of the radical group in the social reform movement in varions ways, including regular contributions to the new weekly. On questions of national politics too, Trichur offered no less opportunity for active participation than Palghat.

The two and a half years I spent in Trichur (from June 1929 when I joined the college to early January 1932 when I left it to join the Congress-led Civil Disobedience movement) proved very fruitful. Significant developments were taking place both in the radical social reform and national political movements. My interest in both increased enormously, I was in fact, converted into an active participant in both. It offered me the practical training for what I was going to become—a professional revolutionary.

My academic pursuits also helped in this. A student of history from the fifth form upwards, I chose Ancient History and Indian History as my optional subjects for the two-year Intermediate course. During the subsequent two-year term of B. A. I was to study General Economics, European History and Indian History. (Many boys had taken Indian History since they already had it in the Intermediate. For the same reason, I chose European History.) If I had completed my B.A, I would have studied in addition, Special Economics and Political Science in senior B. A. Apart from the prescribed textbooks, I read a lot of books both from the college library and from other friends.

It should be interesting to note that, though the college was owned and managed by the Catholic Church (the Bishop being the owner and several teachers, including the Principlal, Reverend Fathers), its library provided me with the first two books I was to read in my life on socialism and communism. The former, if I remember rightly, was by G.D.H. Cole and the latter by Professor Laski—both in the Everyman's Library series. They were, of course, written from the right social-democratic angle, as I learnt later; the explanations were in many respects misleading. But, as an introduction, for a beginner like me, the reading of those books was helpful. So was the reading of a book by Bernard Shaw, titled, *Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism.*

Involved as I was in intense public activity, my friends were apprehensive that I would neglect my studies. This, however was far from the true. My daily routine was quite methodical. Preparation for the day's work in the college did not take more than an hour in the morning. Another two morning hours for reading other books and literature, evening two or three hours for public activity, and an hour to two for reading the newspapers and other books. This daily routine allowed me, even while active in public life, to be upto the mark in class. Even during the examinations, I did not have to "mug up", since I had the practice of weekly revisions. I was always prepared for academic tests, even though I was active in public life.

On the eve of my examinations for the Intermediate (March, 1931), I was busy almost every day in demonstrations in the evenings (including one in protest against the execution of

Bhagat Singh and his two comrades). This made one of my close well-wisher's remark that I was sure to fail in the examination. When the result came I had passed with first class, though it was rare for a history student to get a first class.

As any other student, I had to study English and one of the Indian languages—Sanskrit in my case. Among the optionals too, I had to study Logic in the Intermediate. It was, however, Ancient and Indian History in the Intermediate classes, together with the beginnings of General Economics, European History and Economic History in the first year of B.A. that benefitted me most for the future. I had to unlearn many things that were taught in those two and a half years, but what I learnt then gave me a grounding for subsequent studies which turned me into a student of Marxism-Leninism.

The days in the college gave me an opportunity to come close to Catholicism as an institution. The Principal and other Catholic teachers (laymen as well as clergymen) were, of course, particular that the institution should be run in a "Catholic environment". Catholic boys were obliged to observe all the rituals of their religion, one of these being that at 12 noon every day, the Catholic boys in the mixed class would stand up for a couple of minutes and offer prayers. If the teacher at the moment happened to be a Catholic, he joined them. Non-Catholics were, of course, free from these rituals, as well as from the Bible classes.

The "Catholic environment", however, was not opposed, in fact it was favourable, to the secular culture of the Malayalees. It was a treat for us to listen to the Principal (a priest) giving lectures in English with a pleasant mixture of chaste Malayalam. He was the patron of a new cultural monthly in Malayalam which he used to refer to in his lectures. One of our English teachers, M.P. Paul, and a science teacher, Mundesseri, developed in subsequent years into eminent literary critics. The latter, incidentally, turned to active politics and joined the first Communist Ministry (1957-59) as its Education Minister. I found that there was no difference between a Hindu and a Christian there, except for their religious beliefs and practices Christianity in general, including Catholicism, got acclimatised

to Kerala culture and had become an integral part of the latter for centuries.

The fact, however, remains that the community was generally hostile to the national movement. Gandhi was considered (with all his attachment to the Bible) as "anti-Christ". The community's elite were foremost in heckling us boys when we went around the town in demonstrations of protest when some repressive action was taken by the British during the 1930 Salt Satyagraha days and later when (following the Gandhi-Irwin Pact) we started picketing foreign clothshops. Many of those who in later years donned the "nationalist" clothes to attack us as communists, were then attacking us as "anti-loyal" ! It was, therefore, a matter of pride for me that, when in January 1932 I got arrested for participation in the Congress-led Civil Disobediance Movement, the college magazine wrote a brief note appreciating my action. The editor who did it, our English teacher M.P. Paul, himself a Catholic, had to pay the price. Given a quit notice, he had to set up his own tutorial college.

I cannot but recall with gratitude our teacher of Indian History in the intermediate and General Economics in the junior B.A., R. Narayan Swamy, a non-Catholic. Appreciating me as a diligent student and invariably giving me high marks, he gave me 34 marks (just one short of the pass marks) in the first terminal examination for General Economics in the junior B.A., saying "your answers are correct. I have no quarrel with you on that. The lower marks I have given you is intended to impress up on you the fact that Economics is a science with its technical terms. You have used the layman's language and not the technical terms."

About two years later, after my release from jail, he saw me on the Trichur rounds, and called me to say "I am glad you have come out. I am your well-wisher. You could have told me before you left to join the Civil Disobedience Movement." Years later, when I was a Chief Minister in 1967-69 and participated in a function organised by the staff and students to give a warm send off to this dedicated teacher on retirement, I heard the following poignant words from him : "I have served here for over 30 years and am leaving it with nothing except

the hundreds of my former students." He was, naturally an ardent supporter of his former colleague in the college and later Education Minister during 1957-59, Joseph Mundesseri, for his endeavours to uplift the lot of the teaching community.

My years in the college saw tempestuous developments in the social, political and cultural fields. Socially, the Namboodiri youth were going forward from limited reforms in social customs and manners to the revolutionary restructuring of society. So were the youth belonging to other castes and communities. Politically, those were the years when, following the Lahore Congress, lakhs of people—men, women and children—were being drawn into the Salt Satyagraha and other manifestations of the intense urge for national freedom. No caste, community, social group could remain unaffected by this new wave. Sharp conflicts broke out between the pro-British loyalists and bourgeois liberals, the latter and the Congress nationalists, the right and the left among the nationalists, and so on. Conflicts broke out also between the spokesmen of caste-and-community-based politicians, on the one hand, and nationalists of various hues, on the other. Culturally, the period witnessed the emergence of a new literature and new art forms which reflected the radical trends in the social and political fields. The main thing, so far as I am concerned, was that I was no more a mere spectator but an active participant in all of them.

The radical youth among the Namboodiris had, in fact, adopted many of the forms and techniques of agitation and struggles being perfected by the Congress. To take one instance, the bigamous marriages or marriages in which young girls were "given in marriage" to old men ware picketed on a *wide* scale. Secondly, the problem of educating the Namboodiri youth—boys as well as girls—was focussed in a statewide *Yachana Yatra* (beggars' march) with the ostensible purpose of collecting donations (in kind and cash) for poor boys for whom there was no way of educating themselves, since the senior members of the family would not pay a single paisa. This was organised on the lines of the Dandi March of Mahatma Gandhi. The leaders and activists of the Namboodiri Yuvajana Sangham were, besides, broadly sympathetic to the national movement. Many,

including me, were activists of the radical social reform and national political movements simultaneously.

One specific form of popular agitation propaganda adopted by the radical Namboodiri youth was the staging of dramas exposing the evil customs and practices within the community. The first of these under the title *From the Kitchen to the Stage*, had its focus on (a) school education, (b) protest against the existing evil practices concerning marriage, (c) abolition of the *purdah* system, etc. It was the first instance, not only for this particular community but in Kerala itself, when this drama form of agitation was being used. Followed as this was by other dramas staged by the Namboodiris themselves, it was subsequently developed by the Communist Party.

While participting in all these activities, I was helping in the running of the weekly organ of the Namboodiri Yuvajana Sangham—first informally (contributing one or two pieces every week), and then formally as assistant editor. My work in this field helped in my own socio-political education and the education of readers of the paper. Instead of confining to the problems of the particular community in whose name the paper was coming out, the columns of the paper were used to broadcast radical views covering all subjects. One particular writer who subsequently rose to eminence in literature (Keshav Dev) was a regular contributor; so were a few others. My own pieces covered a variety of subjects ranging from book reviews to current international developments. (One piece that comes to memory now is what I wrote on the British Cabinet's decision to delink that country's currency, the pound sterling, from gold.) On national questions, of course, readers were kept in touch with all developments—from the Lahore Congress to the coming back of Mahatma Gandhi from the Second Round Table Conference (with which my association with the paper ceased, since I left Trichur to join the Civil Disobedience Movement).

Though not strictly as a part of running the paper, it is worth mentioning that I wrote a biography of Jawaharlal Nehru in Malayalam—my first booklet of a political character. Together with the pieces that I wrote in the paper itself, this showed that I was developing as a political journalist. Relevant

is also a piece I wrote in our college magazine on the problem of princely states—a subject which I had to deal with a great deal in my later life. Another piece I wrote in this period was the introduction to a social novel on the life of Namboodiri families. Its importance lies in the forthright stand I took in favour of inter-caste marriages, saying that all the reforms in marriage practices for which we were working were to develop into a system under which boys and girls belonging to different castes could freely enter into marriage relations as they like. Although unimaginable at that time and although still not very widespread, inter-caste marriages are now increasingly becoming common.

Although to a much lesser extent than in the radical social reform, my active involvement in the national freedom movement began in my college days. Till the inauguration of the Salt Satyagraha in May 1930, I was not so active on this front as after it. During the pendency of the movement, the arrest of national leaders, or any other incident, roused us to huge demonstrations in the town. Taking signatures of people in forms pledging that the signatory would use only *swadeshi* clothes, was another form of activity. Still another was *khadi* hawking, i.e., groups of people (five to six) going from house to house with as much *khadi* clothes as one could carry on one's shoulders and selling it to whoever was prepared to buy. Any one of these three forms of activity used to engage us in most of the evenings.

Once the Salt Satyagraha was withdrawn following the Gandhi-Irwin Pact (1931), the activity assumed a new form—picketing of foreign cloth shops. Picketing of toddy shops was also permitted under the Pact but was not organised anywhere in Kerala except in Malabar. Picketing of foreign cloth shop in which we the volunteers had to incur the wrath and ridicule of the shopowners and customers, was my first baptism in political confrontation in which we came face to face with our opponents. Under the rules of Satyagraha, we were bound to remain non-violent, not only in action and word but in thought as well.

During the Salt Satyagraha days, a question arose in my mind as in the minds of several of my friends : Should we join

the movement and get arrested ? If so, we would have to go to Calicut in Malabar, since the Cochin area, where Trichur is situated, was out of bounds for direct action. Quite a few left for Calicut but many were turned back, the leaders there advising them to help the movement in other ways. I was one of those who did not even attempt it. It was the activities in which I was directly involved during the Salt Satyagraha and then after the Gandhi-Irwin Pact that made me determined to participate in the movement if the agreement broke down and the struggle was to be resumed.

Following the Gandhi-Irwin Pact and the Karachi Congress, there was a political conference which was presided over by the Bengal Congress leader J.M. Sengupta. Other all-India leaders like K.F. Nariman of Bombay were also participants. Here I saw a large number of young men and a few women who had participated in the Salt Satyagraha and had come to the conference with the enthusiasm born out of participation in the militant struggles. They included many who, in later years, became my colleagues and comrades in the Congress Socialist Party and the Communist Party, though I did not have any personal contatct with them at the conference itself.

The inauguration, on November 1, 1931, of the Guruvayur Temple Entry Satyagraha and connected activities also identified me with the Congress organisation. I was slowly but surely moving to take the plunge which I ultimately took on January 4, 1932, the day the college reopened after the Christmas holidays. Students' class boycott that day was complete. I, for one, left the college after seeing how the student community unanimously responded to the boycott call.

CHAPTER 7

THE PLUNGE

LEAVING THE COLLEGE IN JANUARY 1932 HAS BEEN characterised in the last chapter as taking the plunge. For a young man in his twenty-third year—one who had been born and brought up in an environment as mine—it certainly was a plunge. By that single action, I was cutting off the class moorings of my entire upbringing, though its full implications were not then clear to anybody, including myself.

It was the realisation of the seriousness of the step I was now taking that kept me from joining the Salt Satyagraha in 1930. Earlier still, it was the same realisation of the implications that made me develop cold feet at the last moment regarding the boycott of the Simon Commission. The developments of 1930-1931—my active participation in such activities as helping and supporting the militant freedom movement—made me fully determined that, regardless of consequences, I should take the plunge. I, however, knew that my family—mother, above all—would not permit me and that I might not be able to resist their pressure. The humiliation of what I did at the time of the Simon Commission boycott should at all costs be avoided. I, therefore, deliberately kept myself away from them by not going home during the Christmas holidays.

I could not and did not want to keep my decision a secret to a close circle of my friends and colleagues in Trichur. Many of them were sympathetic. Those who were not, were also my well-wishers and supported me individually. With the warm good wishes of them all, I left Trichur, leaving a written message to the readers of the weekly *Unni Namboodiri* with which I

was actively associated for two and a half years. On my way to Calicut I stopped for a few hours in Pattambi (16 kms from my home) where a meeting of the Working Committee of the *Namboodiri Yuvajana Sangham* was being held. One of the Committee members who came to the meeting was a close family friend and was likely to inform my family. But by that time, I foolishly thought, things would have gone beyond retreat.

This turned out to be a miscalculation. Reaching Calicut, I went to a lodge where two of my close friends—colleagues in the social reform movement—were residing. One of them was a practising lawyer who took me to his lawyer brother, the kingpin of the Congress Satyagraha organisation. Knowing my family and social background, he welcomed me heartily but told me that I would have to wait for a few days to get arrested. For, I must not get arrested as an ordinary volunteer but as the third 'dictator' of the Congress movement. The conditions of Satyagraha had made it necessary to replace the Congress Committee and its President by a 'dictator'. The second 'dictator' was to get arrested the same day and, before breaking the law, he would nominate me, if I agreed to be his successor. Four or five days after this, I would break the law and get arrested. On my agreeing, the second 'dictator' announced the nomination which was published in the papers.

I did not know the extent of commotion that my decision caused in my family circles since I was away from them. But I had two visitors who came to dissuade me from proceeding as announced. One was the gentleman who had taught me Sanskrit and *Rigveda*. I was with him for almost a decade, our relations being like father and son, rather than teacher and pupil. Though an orthodox Brahmin himself, he was liberal enough to understand me. Getting to know from my friends the extent of my determination, he did not verbally speak anything against what I was proposing to do. In words surcharged with emotion, he merely said : "I do not care if, on coming out of jail, you are ostracised in the community. I am concerned with the beating that you may be subjected to". I did not respond in words, but from my face he might have guessed that there was no use of continuing the agonising interview. He withdrew.

The next visitor was our family lawyer. Briefed as he was by my mother, he used all his powers of persuasion to convince me that I was causing utmost pain to mother. "I don't know", he said, "what will happen to the old lady." Unlike in the interview with my teacher, I could be frank with him. "Do you know what will happen to me ?" I asked and answered, "this is such a matter of conscience and honour to me that if I am forced to retrace my step, I would not consider this life worth living." At this he too withdrew. Several weeks later, I received in jail a moving letter (written by another lady since mother herself could not write) referring to these words of mine and assuring me that she wished me well and prayed for my health.

Having crossed all the hurdles that were on the way of doing what I had set my mind on, I had to wait till January 17, the date fixed for leading my "followers" in breaking the law and being clamped in jail. The preliminary act of serving an order on me under Section 144 of the relevant Act was carried out by a responsible CID man, followed by the days of waiting. On January 16th evening, I was asked to go to a 'hiding place'—in fact, it was the residence of the Congress leader and the main organiser of the Satyagraha—where two of us Satyagrahis were to stay till we had to start for the sea beach where we were to break the law. By 5 p.m. on the 17th the two of us were taken along bylanes to a point where we were joined by a third person. The three of us marching, we took out the national tricolour flag and held it aloft. Before starting from our residence, I had signed a letter nominating my successor, i.e., the next 'dictator'.

We had to walk in procession more than a mile to reach the sea beach where we were to break the law. Had the police wanted to prevent us from reaching the spot and breaking the law, this would have a long enough distance to walk for getting arrested. If they had done that, however, there was another batch of Satyagrahis. In fact, we were allowed to proceed till the spot of Satyagraha. We found on arrival there that a huge crowd had collected, and the police were in complete readiness. Before we could do anything by way of formally breaking the law, we were arrested, put in a van and taken to the police

station. This was followed, as I learnt later, by a militant demonstration in which the police resorted to a brutal lathi-charge. One of the victims of the attack was later brought to the police lock-up with his head in bandages.

Spending the night and the forenoon of the next day in police lock-up, we were produced before a magistrate in the afternoon. The next day was fixed for trial and we were ordered to be kept in the sub-jail. After the trial next day, we were convicted on the third day (January 20) to varying terms of imprisonment; I got three years with a fine of Rs. 100, or another eight months if the fine was not paid. Since Satyagrahis usually did not pay fine, my term would normally be over only in September 1935. This, however, was reduced by eight moths because my people, under the threat of attachment of family property, had paid the fine. This would have kept me in jail till January 1935. But, I actually came out of jail on August 31, 1933, as I was one of those unimportant Congressmen whom the government considered it safe to release earlier, keeping only a handful of the top people in jail.

A week in the Calicut sub-jail, about three weeks in the Cannanore Central jail and the rest of the period in Vellore Central Jail—this was how I went through the period of my imprisonment. This was because, as per the existing rules, two out of the three accused in our batch (including me) were considered by the trying magistrate as belonging to such "respectable" families as to be put in the highest division (A class), and all prisoners in this division in the then Madras Presidency were being kept in Vellore. We would, however, be taken there only after the government confirmed the Magistrate's order recommending this division for us; till then we had to be kept in Cannanore.

As soon as we stepped into the Calicut Sub-jail, we were greeted by my would-be comrade about whom I have written in the preceding pages—Krishna Pillai. He had by then established himself as an energetic leader of the rank and file Congressmen who would not tolerate any nonsense from the right-wing Congress leaders, nicknamed "Sunday Congressmen"—a reference to their court practice on week days, leaving them free for

Congress work only on Sundays. Although I had heard much about him, I had not met him earlier. Here too, we had only a few hours since he, along with his batch, was taken to Cannanore a day after we met in the Calicut Sub-jail. He and a large number of others, including A.K. Gopalan, who became my comrade in the Socialist and later the Communist Party, were in C class in Cannanore while we were in A. Our contact, therefore, was minimal.

In Cannanore, however, we developed wider contacts, in the political sense. For, three top leaders of the revolutionary groups of Bengal were in that jail—not as convicted prisoners but detained without trial to keep them away from activities "prejudicial" to the British government. So was K.N. Tiwari, a comrade-in-arms of martyr Bhagat Singh, and a prisoner convicted for life. Still another was Kiran Das, younger brother of martyr Jatin Das of Bengal who lost his life in a prolonged hunger strike—an occasion when we had gone on a big protest demonstration in Trichur. Das was kept with us in the same cell in Cannanore, taken with us to Vellore and, after a few weeks, transferred to Bengal and then released. The four others—Kamal Nath Tiwari of the Lahore Conspiracy Case, and R.M.Sen Gupta, T.N. Chakravarty and R.C. Acharya, the Bengal detenus—had relatively greater freedom to move about. Talks with all of them proved to be my first introduction to revolutionary politics. I also knew that a large number of Congressmen put in the C class in Cannenore were being similarly influenced by revolutionary politics.

The process continued in Vellore. Although the bulk of our co-prisonners there were top Congress leaders from all over Madras (including Rajagopalachary, Prakasam, Pattabhi, etc.), there was another comrade of Bhagat Singh, Jayadev Kapoor. Still another gentleman was languishing in jail for over 15 years as a life convict. He was a Punjabi Sikh, Kher Singh. While the latter was quiet and soft-spoken, the former had established himself as too militant for the authorities. These two, however, were transferred after a few weeks. But, in place of Kapoor, Tiwari was brought from Cannanore, but after remaining with us for a few months, he also was transferred.

While Tiwari was in Vellore, he had contacted many Con-

gressmen who expressed sympathy for the revolutionary cause. He brought together two of them—Gopala Reddi of Andhra and C.Subrahmaniam of Tamil Nadu and the three of us from Malabar—C.K. Govindan Nair, Gopalan Unni and myself—to form a revolutionary group. That, however, was the first as well as the last meeting of the "group". As things turned out, Reddy and Subrahmaniam became ministers in Congress governments, while Gopalan Unni and myself joined the Communist Party. Our transformation from ordinary Congressmen into leftists and revolutionaries, and then into socialists and communists, was quicker and in a shorter time-span than that of friends and comrades in, say, Bengal or the northern states.

Among our co-prisoners in Vellore were leaders of another kind. One was Mukunda Lal Sarkar, a secretary of the All-India Trade Union Congress. There was also N.G. Ranga who claimed to be a spokesman of the peasantry. Along with the socialists and communists, he was later to be an active organiser (and for some time President) of the All India Kisan Sabha. The friendship that developed between him and me in those days led to our subsequent cooperation in kisan and, in general, left politics.

Comrades and friends of the Bengal and north Indian revolutionary movement were, in fact, changing their basic approach —from individual acts to collective mass action. New windows were thus opening before us, making it clear that we would be coming out of jail as new men.

Let me anticipate a little : almost forty years later, when my son was about the same age as me when I was in the Cannanore and Vellore jails, he wrote me a letter from Madras where he was working as an auditor : "Why do you not consider what you did when you were of my present age?" He was suggesting that he give up the job and take to whole time party work. As a matter of fact, I had not put any parental pressure on him concerning the career that he was to choose. Now that he was anxious to change over to whole time party work, I extended a comradely welcome to him. He has since then been using his capacities (as auditor and otherwise) to help the party which I associated myself with four decades earlier

CHAPTER 8

THE SECOND CRISIS OF GANDHIAN LEADERSHIP

A MAJOR DEVELOPMENT IN INDIAN POLITICS which took place when I was in Vellore jail was the fast undertaken by Mahatma Gandhi in protest against the communal award given by the British Prime Minister. The award was described by him as an injustice done not only to the national movement in general but to the Depressed Classes (Harijans) themselves. The discussion that took place in the wake of the fast ended in the vow undertaken by the Mahatma that he would devote the rest of his life to serve the Harijans. The name of the Gandhian weekly was then changed from *Young India* to *Harijan*. An *All-Indian Harijan Sevak Sangh* was formed.

Being still influenced by the Gandhian and other bourgeois ideologies, I was not able to understand what this meant. As a person interested in social reforms of a radical character, I had some sympathy for the new movement intitiated by Gandhi. I was particularly happy that in Kerala itself interdining was being organised on a large scale in which many, male and even female, members of the till-then-orthodox Namboodiri families sat and ate along with a large number of "untouchable" men and women; this I thought was the logical development of the social reform movement with which I began my public life, continuing it till I joined the Civil Disobedience Movement. I was happy that the prestige and authority of the tallest leaders of the freedom movement were being used to advance social reforms.

Gradually, however, a feeling developed in me, as in several other friends in various Indian jails, that this was becoming a diversion from the political movement for freedom. This expressed itself in the emergence of various groups within the Congress, two of which deserve special mention; (1) the Congress Parliamentary Board consisting of those who wanted to engage themselves in parliamentary activities and desired that the Congress should adopt the Parliamentary programme ; and (2) those who thought that neither the parliamentary programme advocated by some Congress leaders nor the Harijan-related and other items of Gandhian constructive programme would serve to advance the freedom movement. What is required, they said, was a radical change in direction and approach, what they called a move towards socialism. The latter subsequently formed themselves as the Congress Socialist Party.

My own intellectual development, while in jail, tended towards the second of the two groups about which I had read in the papers. A voracious reader that I was, I grabbed every opportunity which was provided by the large number of books available, the talks given by experienced political leaders and informal discussion among intimate friends, to widen my political horizon. Basing myself on what I studied, I produced a manuscript with the title *From Paris to Moscow*—a history of the struggle for democracy which began with the French Revolution of the 18th century and culminated in the Russian Revolution of the twentieth—and a second one on Sun Yat-sen's *Three Principles of the People*, i.e. nationalism, democracy and the people's livlihood. Neither of them, however, was published.

A third one which was, in fact, published had the title *1917* which, however, I heartily disapproved of after its publication. This particular work was based on the only book on the October Revolution that was available in jail—a three-volume book written by Leon Trotsky. (It is worth noting that, while works by Lenin and Stalin could not be procured in jail or even outside, there was no difficulty in getting Trotsky's) I must add that even though I was struck with the moving account of the October Revolution given in the book, it did not make me share the anti-Stalin and anti-Soviet venom conveyed in the book. What was

relevant according to me was not how the revolution developed in 1917, nor the role, played by Stalin and Trotsky respectively after Lenin's death, but what the Soviet state was doing to overcome the backwardness of that country, and develop into a modern state with advanced economy. Since the years of my jail life I have never wavered in my faith that the successes of the Soviet Union are the successes of the world peoples, including our own Indian people.

With this type of intellectual and political development while in jail, I naturally supported the move for the formation of the All-India Congress Socialist Party. I attended the first preliminary consultation conference in Patna in May 1934 and then the foundation or the first all-India Conference in Bombay in October. Elected at the latter Conference one of the all-India Joint Secretaries, I continued in that post till, on the outbreak of the war, my connection with that party was severed. I had in the meanwhile (in the latter half of 1935) come into contact with the Communist Party (through Sundarayya) which led me, along with others in the Kerala CSP including Krishna Pillai, to form the first Kerala unit of the CPI in July 1937. The furious struggle that broke out within the CSP itself as well as between the CSP and the CPI culminated in the wholesale transformation of the Kerala CSP into the CPI.

Although a communist since 1935 (or in any case, from 1937) I brought with me into the CPI a lumberload of bourgeois ideology. I, therefore, had to live all this down through prolonged struggles within myself, subject myself to the sharp criticism and self-criticism within the Party—before as well as after the 1964 split. This enabled me to look back at the developments that led to and followed the Mahatma's 1932 hunger-strike in jail. I have, in fact, set my ideas down in my book *The Mahatma and His Ism*, and again in *The History of India's Freedom Movement*.

Applying the Marxist theory of class struggle to the national political movement, to the personality and preachings of the Mahatma, the tallest of its leaders for over a quarter century before independence, I pointed out that the Mahatma was the most effective though not the typical representative of the Indian bourgeoisie. His theory of non-violence and trusteeship, his

reliance on purification of the individual as a means of strengthening the national army fighting for freedom, his ideal of Ram Rajya, etc., served the bourgeoisie in realising the dual objective of (a) mobilising the masses, using their militancy in the struggle for freedom, and (b) ensuring that the aroused masses do not go beyond the limits which are safe for the property owning classes. Unlike his eminent colleagues, however, the Mahatma was not himself member of the class to whose aspirations he objectively gave expression.

There was, in fact, a wide gulf between his moral-political world outlook and the agitational and organisational programme which made him the leader of the nation. The bourgeoisie, whose typical representatives constituted "the Congress High Command" had no use for the former but heartily welcomed the latter. In the very process of carrying out the programme, his outlook and actions led on several occasions to conflicts which developed into a sort of crises. The particular crisis which broke out in the wake of his imprisonment in 1932 was, chronologically speaking, the second. Earlier, in the wake of the 1921-22 wave of mass direct action which he withdrew, characterising the call given by him earlier a "Himalayan blunder". It led to what may be called the first crisis of Gandhian leadership. On both the occasions those of his lieutenants who were dissatisfied with him opted for the parliamentary programme—"Swarajists" in the twenties, "Congress Parliamentary Board" in the thirties. On both occasions, he disagreed with them, but in the end blessed them.

During the second crisis, in fact, Gandhi himself moved the resolution in the AICC meeting of May 1934, declaring that "the parliamentary programme has come to stay." A witness to all that happened at the meeting, I recall the furious debate between the leftists led by the newly-formed Congress Socialist Party and the rightist combination of Gandhiites and election-*walas*.

The battle the latter won but it was not a final victory. Within two years of that victory, the Lucknow session of the Congress (April 1936) adopted a set of resolutions reflective of the views of the left which, in fact, had been anticipated in the

presidential address delivered by Jawaharlal Nehru. The new Working Commitee nominated after the session also included some Congress Socialists. With the election of Nehru himself for a second term (1936-37) and Subhas Bose next, there followed a continuous three-year period of leftist presidents of the Congress who nominated a couple of leftist members each to their respective Working Committee.

This reflected a new correlation of forces within the Congress, a growing ascendancy of the left in its ranks which could not but have its impact on the leadership. Its beginnings could be seen in the latter half of the twenties but it got accelerated in the early years of the thirties. The transformation in approach of the earlier action groups using revolutionary methods of struggle (such as the Bhagat Singh group and large numbers of Bengal revolutionaries) from individual to mass action, from the cult of the bomb to the ideology of socialism and commitment to mass actions, were the first signs of the new correlation of forces. While the withdrawal by Mahatma Gandhi of direct action in the twenties led to a proliferation of revolutionary groups based on individual action, the withdrawal of the movement in 1933-34 led to the formation of the All-India Congress Socialist Party, closely followed by the unification of the scattered groups of communists to form an all-India centre of the Communist Party of India. Inside the Congress leadership too, Jawaharlal Nehru, who had earlier declared his adherence to socialism, further developed his ideas in a series of articles under the title *Whither India*. The struggle inside the Congress was thus transformed into one between the socialism-oriented left and its opposite consisting of the Gandhians on the one hand and bourgeois liberal parliamentarians on the other.

These developments were taking place at a time when imperialism was launching a cunning offensive against the national movement, mobilising all divisive and separatist forces against the demand for Complete Independence. The two Round Table Conferences (1930 and 1931) held in London—the first of which was boycotted, and the second participated in by the Congress with the Mahatma as its "sole representative"—were the efforts made by the British rulers to knock together a reactionary front against the Congress comprising the princely

rulers of "Indian India", Muslim and other religious minorities, landed and business interests, "lower" castes, etc. This helped them to isolate the Congress, forcing its "sole representative", Gandhi, to return not only empty-handed but saddled with the communal award which was capable of mobilising millions of non-Hindus and non-caste Hindus against "high caste Hindu domination". The constitutional reforms which were on the anvil, would be based on this.

Gandhi's hunger strike in jail against the communal award was the first protest. The British Government was forced to replace the separate electorate for the Depressed Classes by the provision of reservation in general constituencies. The alienation of that section of the people from the Congress was in a way checked. It, however, failed in relation to other minority communities like Muslims, Sikhs, etc. These minorities, as well as south India's Justice Party, continued to be opposed to the Congress ; their leaders (including M.A. Jinnah, the one-time nationalist), organised their communities against the Congress. Subsequently, they were to be used in the years of the "final attainment of independence"—the tragedy which broke Gandhi's heart, forcing him to refrain from joining the festivities organised all over the country to celebrate the dawn of independence on August 15, 1947.

Reserving these developments to be narrated in the following pages, I may state here only that this was the first time that the Gandhian technique of non-violent civil resistance suffered a fiasco. The earlier (1921) movement was withdrawn by its leader himself who declared that his original call was "a Himalayan blunder". Now, however, he was clearly outmanoeuvred by the British. The fast he undertook in protest was, in fact, a defensive action in character, calculated to salvage as much as possible under the circumstances.

CHAPTER 9

WHY SOCIALISM—AND HOW

ALONG WITH SEVERAL OTHER CONGRESSMEN—senior and junior—I was released in August 1933. Unlike a large number of them, however, I had no earlier experience of direct political work, my activities having been confined, before imprisonment, mainly to social reform movement. Now that I had completed my baptism of jail life as a Congressman, I had to devote myself wholetime to political work.

In the first few months, of course, I continued my contacts with my friends and colleagues in the social reform movement. I rendered them some assistance as well, particularly by way of contributing to the *Unni Namboodiri*. I also had to participate in the management of family property which, in less than two years (in 1935), underwent partition.

But my main activity was political, as a Congressman. The question was: what could I do considering my limitations? The answer was given by Krishna Pillai who knew my capacities as well as limitations. Within the Congress in Kerala—Malabar in particular—an organised left was taking shape (he being the key figure). They had already started organising trade unions, leading strikes, etc. Peasants too could be organised. The left group in the Congress could become a force with roots among the toilers. I could use my capacities for this work.

Independently of us, with the initiative taken by a section of individual Congressmen, a movement was at that time developing—protest against the enhancement of land revenue in the Malabar district. Parallel to this was another movement in a

local area of the Cochin state, part of Kerala, it was a Satyagraha on the question of rural indebtedness. We, left-Congressmen (who were by and large confined to the Malabar area) became active in the former. I myself started working in my own *taluk* where a conference was held on the question of land revenue. I was elected as one of the two joint secretaries of the committee set up at the conference.

While being active in organising conferences, etc., on this question, I followed the developments that took place in relation to rural indebtedness. A committee set up by the Madras provincial government to enquire into the question had submitted its report. Having studied that report as well as other officially published material (including the Banking Commission report), I wrote a three-piece article in the *Mathrubhumi*, analysing the problem of rural indebtedness.

The questions of land revenue and rural indebtedness were, of course, important but only if they were related to the main problem—*jenmi*-tenant relationship. A part of it had been solved with the adoption of the Malabar Tenancy Act but the large mass of tenants were denied the relief granted to a small section of the better-off ones. The question of the *jenmi*-tenant relationship had, therefore, to be carried forward. I started studying this question as well.

Basis was thus being laid for developing a peasant movment which fights for the various demands of peasants. It was this that developed, in a couple of years, into the *Malabar Karshaka Sangham* affiliated to the All India Kishan Sabha. My work in this direction helped me later (in 1939-40) to write a minute of dissent to the report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee (appointed in 1939).

These, however, were subsequent developments. What about the immediate present? What is the direction is which the left Congressmen should move politically? The answer came from outside Kerala. As noted in the preceding pages, there was a move to form a party of Congressmen who accepted and would be working for socialism; an all-India conference was being held in Patna for the purpose. It was decided that we in Malabar should cooperate with the move. I was asked to attend it. Three or four days before I was to leave for Patna, a meeting of

like-minded people was held in Calicut. A Kerala unit of the proposed all-India party was formed. I was, therefore, going to Patna not in my individual capacity but as a representative of the new organisation formed in Kerala.

Worth mentioning here is the fact that the Calicut meeting was presided over by the well-known Gandhiite, Kelappan. He knew many of those who were working for the formation of the Socialist Party. He was also worried over the fact that the right-wing in the Congress was moving along the parliamentary path. As an elder Congressman, therefore, he blessed the Congress youth and wished them well. In a few days, however, he learned that the left (socialist) Congressmen were fundamentally opposed to the Gandhian outlook and programme, and that the all-India Congress leadership as well as Mahatma Gandhi himself had come out against the socialists. Following this, he wrote an editorial comment in his paper, *Mathrubhumi*, under the title "Beware of them".

Worth mentioning is also the name of the gentleman who was elected president of the Kerala unit of the Congress Socialist Party—C.K. Govindan Nair. Unlike Kelappan who presided over the meeting, Nair was known not as a Gandhiite but as a Congressman sympathetic to the revolutionary cause. He was, in fact, one of those whom the revolutionaty leader Kamal Nath Tiwari brought together in Vellore jail to form a group in Kerala. Having been thus made president of the CSP in Kerala, he was in a few weeks' time elected one of the Kerala PCC secretaries. The other secretary was myself. A couple of months later, however, he resigned from the CSP and, since then remained a right-wing Congress leader right up to his death in the 1960s, though in his last days he became a patron of what came to be known as the A.K. Antony group of Congress youth.

Why did Kelappan and Nair associate themselves with the formation of the CSP but later turned into its opponents? Because the spokesmen of the new party proved to be opponents of the entire right-wing in the Congress leadership—from the Gandhians to the parliamentarians. The Bombay session of the Congress in October became the arena of a furious battle between the right and the left: Gandhi and his disciples, together

with the parliamentarians led by Bhulabhai Desai, K.M. Munshi etc., constituted the right while the CSP led by Jayaprakash, Narendra Dev, Sampuranand, Kamala Devi, Meherali, etc., formed the leadership of the left. J.P. made one of the most remarkable speeches in opposition to the Gandhian programme of rural reconstruction centered around the *khadi* and village industries. His evolution from the then opponent to the subsequent exponent of the Gandhian programme is an interesting development.

A couple of days before the Congress session, the first all-India Conference of the CSP was held. The political preparations for the formation of the new party had earlier been made by a committee constituted at Patna in May (with J.P. as its convener). As the convener of the committee, J.P. visited Kerala and acquainted himself with the problems and personalities in the state. Having visited other states as well, he could prepare a panel of state names for the National Executive of the new party. I was chosen not only a member of the Executive but named as one of the four joint secretaries : M.R. Masani, N.G. Gore and Mohanlal Gautam were the other joint secretaries.

J.P.'s visit to Kerala was a milestone for me, a turning point in my political evolution. Apart from the intimate talks that we (Krishna Pillai and myself) had with him I listened to his speech in the Calicut Town Hall—a lucid explanation of the socialist position on the major problems of the day. Socialism, he explained, is not only the objective towards which India's struggle for freedom should be led but a programme of immediate action—rousing and organising the working class, peasantry and other sections of the working people without whose militant and organised participation the freedom struggle cannot succeed. Socialism, in other words, is not only the end but also a means to achieve the end.

J.P. subsequently developed the theme in a book under the title *Why Socialism?* which helped a large number of left-oriented Congressmen in overcoming their earlier (Gandhian, parliamentarian, petty bourgeois revolutionary, etc.) ideologies and come to the positions of socialism. In a few months' time (February 1935), when a meeting of the National Executive was held in Nagpur, J.P. held an informal meeting of some of us to

expound his conception of the revolutionary movement which had two parts :

(1) the organisation of the peasantry for militant action which he called the "creation of a number of socialist Bardolis". Sardar Patel's work in the no-tax movement in Bardoli was the model but with a different thrust : instead of confining itself to the single issue of taxation as Bardoli did, the movement envisaged by J.P. would take up all questions concerning the agrarian relations, particularly the anti-landlord questions.

(2) Out of the peasantry organised along the lines indicated above, a core of militant cadres should be developed and organised, to form the nucleus with which to seize the seats of power beginning with the police *thanas*.

This perspective opened my eyes to the new approach to politics different from and opposed to Gandhism, parliamentarism, petty bourgeois revolutionarism, etc. It appeared to be very close to but (as I learnt later) was far from the communist approach. J.P.'s approach was summed up in the title of his book *Why Socialism*? But it differed from the communist approach on *how* socialism would come. The very basis of the Congress Socialist Party—an organisation of Congressmen trying to develop the Congress as a socialist organisation—showed that his socialism was a variant of what may be called bourgeois socialism as defined by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*. It was, in fact, another edition of the Nehru Socialism, namely, mobilising the working people (Gandhi's *Daridra Narayan*) behind the bourgeoisie who were at the head of the anti-imperialist movement.

This was sharply criticised by the communists who had, in the meanwhile, unified themselves under the leadership of a Central Committee and a Polit Bureau. The new leadership of the CPI pointed out that it was futile to try to convert the Congress, a political party of the bourgeoisie, into a socialist organisation. The effort, in fact, should be to develop it as *a genuinely anti-imperialist organisation with strong roots in the organised and militant masses*. The CSP accepted this criticism and amended the objective as "developing the Congress as an anti-imperialist organisation."

I had, in the meanwhile, come into contact with communist leader Sundarayya with whom Krishan Pillai and myself had a long chat at Madras in October 1935. This was followed by his visit to Kerala where he met a large number of comrades, thus laying the basis for the formation of the Kerala unit of the CPI. A couple of months later, he came again to Kerala—to my village home along with another Central Committee member, S.V. Ghate. Once again, we had a long chat at the end of which I was formally made a CPI member—on January 8 or 9, 1936, if I remember right. For full four years since then, I combined in myself an active Congressman while holding the post of the all-India joint secretary of the CSP and working as an unannounced member of the CPI.

This was facilitated by two important developments—one in the CSP and the other in the Congress. The second all-India conference of the CSP was held at Meerut which adopted what came to be known as the *Meerut Thesis*. The *Thesis* called for the unity and merger of all the socialist and communist groups in the country, including the CPI, followed by a written agreement on united action between the CPI and the CSP. A large number of communists were, with the full knowledge of the CSP leadership, admitted into the CSP Some of them like K.M. Ashraf, Z.A. Ahmed, S S. Zaheer were taken into the CSP National Executive. The three just named known communists and with them S.S. Batliwala, Dinkar Mehta and myself were functioning as the CPI fraction within the CSP National Executive.

Almost the entire majority of CSP members in Kerala had by then turned communists and, to provide a unified leadership, a top-level committee of the CPI (working underground) was constituted in July 1937. The members of the committee were Krishna Pillai (Secretary), K. Damodaran, N.C. Sekhar and myself.

The second major development was a call for developing the Congress as the organisation of the anti-imperialist front given by Jawaharlal Nehru as President at the Lucknow (1936) session of the Congress. He was re-elected Congress president when the all-India session met at Faizpur in December 1936. These two continuous terms of Nehru as Congress president,

followed by the presidentship of Subhas Bose in 1938, helped consolidation of the left forces in the Congress, including the socialists and communists.

It was against this background that I was elected, first, the organising secretary (1937-38) and, then, secretary of the KPCC for two terms (1938-1940). While I continued as the joint secretary of the all-India Executive of the CSP, Krishna Pillai worked as the Kerala secretary and a member of the KPCC Working Committee.

There was thus no conflict between us in Kerala working as the left Congressmen and socialists outside and as communists inside. It was in full consonance with the *Meerut Thesis* of the CSP and with Nehru's call for the united anti-imperialist front with the socialists and communists as active partners with left Congressmen. This, however, could not continue for more than a couple of years because the CPI sharply differed from both the CSP and Congress leaders like Nehru. The essence of the differences may be spelt out as follows.

1. Both the CSP and Congress leaders (like Nehru) considered the Congress as the national organisation, with groups like the CSP and CPI functioning as ginger groups prodding the Congress on to the left. The CPI, on the other hand, looked upon the Congress as a bourgeois-led national organisation, it being, therefore, obligatory for the communists to work independently, develop themselves into an independent party of the working class, fighting to *wean* the mass of Congressmen away from the bourgeois leadership of Congress. The former owed primary loyalty to the Congress as the national organisation, while for the communists the primary loyalty was to the working class, its class allies, their fighting organisations and to the vanguard of the class—the Communist Party.

2. Arising from the above was the difference in the attitude to the international movement. Congress leaders like Nehru and almost the entire CSP leadership (except M.R. Masani, Ashok Mehta, Ram Manohar Lohia, etc.) had great admiration for the Soviet Union and the international movement but they subordinated their internationalism to Indian nationalism. The CPI, on the other hand, was basically internationalist,

trying to integrate its nationalism or patriotism with proletarian internationalism. The two did not come into conflict with each other till, on the eve of the outbreak of the second world war, the Soviet Union entered into a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany.

The points mentioned above which demarcated the communists from the Congress Socialists, show that the essence of the difference consisted in the class outlook and standpoint. Loyal to the working class internationally as well as nationally, the communists looked upon the mass of Congressmen as potential allies in the struggle against imperialism as well as in the subsequent struggle for socialism. As for the leadership of the Congress party which was bourgeois in class character, the communists looked upon it as basically an adversary but a temporary and conditional ally in the struggle against imperialism. The independent activity of the Party as a force which exposed the vacillations of the bourgeois leadership and tried to win over the mass of Congressmen, was thus the key task of communists working in the Congress. For the CSP and Nehru-type radical Congressmen, loyalty to the Congress as an organisation was all-important to which everything else was subordinated.

On international questions, too, the difference in class approach gradually came into sharp relief. The existence of the USSR, the conspiracies hatched by imperialism against the USSR, the fact that these conspiracies constituted the biggest threat to world peace and to the freedom of nations, the need to avert this threat through developing a worldwide anti-fascist unity, the inseparable link between this anti-fascist unity in the world and the anti-imperialist united front in our country—these were for the communists essential elements of the world situation. For the bourgeois nationalist leaders of the Congress and their petty bourgeois allies of the CSP, the Bose group of Congressmen, etc., it was a question of the international situation threatening British imperialism which can be turned into an opportunity to gain freedom for the country.

To sum up the discussion, the question was not only why socialism, as J.P. put it. The real question was *how* socialism : firstly, under the leadership of the proletariat allying itself with

all anti-imperialist classes and elements and against the Indian bourgeoisie which seeks a compromise with imperialism, or as a dependable ally of the bourgeoisie which was dominating the freedom movement; secondly, with the USSR and other anti-fascist and anti-imperialist powers and forces throughout the world or in splendid isolation from the international revolutionary movement ?

On these basic questions, the CPI and the CSP came into conflict during the years of war. Before going into the development of that conflict, however, it is necessary to explain how we the CSP/CPI comrades of Kerala acted in the pre-war years, how by the outbreak of the war we had developed ourselves into the most significant force in the politics of Malabar, Cochin and Travancore into which the present-day state of Kerala was then divided. We will, therefore, turn to this question now.

CHAPTER 10

SIX YEARS OF ADVANCE

IT WAS IN 1934 THAT WE, THE LEFT CONGRESSMEN in Malabar, formed the Congress Socialist Party unit there. Within the next six years, i.e., in the beginning of 1940, we declared ourselves publicly as the illegally functioning Kerala unit of the CPI with political and organisational roots in Kerala as a whole including the princely states of Cochin and Travancore.

This development should be set against the background of what happened to the CPI. The teething troubles of the CPI had been overcome almost simultaneously with the formation of the all-India CSP The unified central leadership—the C.C. and the P.B. which came into being—had to work underground but its organisers had mastered the technique of combining legal with illegal work. Leaders like Sundarayya and Ghate who had been entrusted with the responsibility of the south, gave us practical guidance in our work which the all-India leaders of the CSP were unable to do.

The formation of Congress ministries in some provinces (including Madras and Bombay) gave still greater opportunities for the close contact between us in Kerala and the all-India leadership of the CPI which helped us in our work as Congressmen, socialists and communists. The *National Front*, the weekly legal organ of the CC of the illegal CPI, was started in Bombay after the Congress ministries were formed; these ministeries gave limited facilities for the communists to work openly. Many communists became members of the AICC and PCCs; two were also elected MLAs in Bengal.

Our work as Congress Socialists had begun earlier than these developments favourable to the CPI occurred. Within a few months of the formation of the CSP unit in Malabar, a weekly Malayalam organ of the party, *Prabhatham* was started, though it had to stop publication (because of the government's action) after less than a year. A large number of trade unions were formed all over Malabar. The organisers of these unions established contacts with existing unions in Cochin and Travancore as also with a handful of unions led by liberals of the Servants of India Society School in Malabar. An all-Kerala labour conference with the participation of all these unions was held at Calicut in May 1935. Together with this was held the first all-Kerala Congress Socialist conference and also the Kerala provincial conference of the Congress of which I was then the secretary. The simultaneous organisation of these three conferences was, in fact, the political debut of the Congress Socialists in Kerala.

By this time, we had not yet established contacts with the CPI leadership. The ideological-political basis of our resolutions was what had been laid down at the Bombay conference of the CSP and its National Executive meetings. Masani was, in fact, the president of the Congress Socialist conference. The M.N. Roy group which called itself Communist Party was, however, represented at Calicut. Its Bombay leader, Maniben Kara, was the president of the labour conference. Another leader of that group, Taiyyab Sheikh, also came though he had no role to play in any of the three conferences. He merely took the opportunity of the conferences to meet us and try to convince us that it is his group, and not the CSP or the "official CPI", that is capable of preparing the people for the Indian revolution.

Within a few weeks, however, the National Executive of the CSP took a formal decision to expel all known "Royists". With the CPI, however, the CSP continued its fraternal relations, allowing known CPI leaders to work as CSP functionaries. C.C. and P.B. members of the CPI had, in fact, participated in the Meerut and Faizpur conferences of the CSP (January 1936 and December 1936) as delegates and functionaries. Though this was not to the liking of a section of the CSP leadership

(Masani, Mehta, Lohia), they could do nothing against it because it was in conformity with the prevailing mood in the CSP. A few top leaders, including J.P., also shared this view.

Coming to the situation in Kerala, our work in the trade unions was making rapid progress, while the peasant movement was slowly gathering strength. Progress in both fronts was helped by the nearly 800 kilometre *Hunger March* led by A.K. Gopalan from the northern end of Malabar through the central and south Malabar and Tamil Nadu, joined by about 40 uniformed volunteers and marching all the way. Almost all the participants were Congress Socialists who subsequently became communists. The successful completion of the march helped consolidation of the trade union and kisan organisations.

This was facilitated by the fact that we were a big force in the Congress in the Malabar region. We were in control of Kerala PCC (Malabar) in 1934-35 and again in 1938-40. In between these two terms, though we lost control over the PCC, we had with us a majority of the lower committees. Again, in 1937 when the Congress leadership decided to have an organising secretary for each PCC, the post was given to us. This enabled us to so develop the Congress committees at all levels that they worked in close cooperation with the developing trade unions, Kisan Sabhas, youth and women's organisations, etc.

The second tenure of our office in the KPCC was a result of these many-sided and integrated activities. At the same time, it still further strengthened the process. In 1938-40, the PCC in the Malabar part of Kerala was, in fact, an embodiment of the Nehru-CSP concept of "the Congress being the anti-imperialist united front" in which the militant organisations of the working people were to play a crucial role. Congress Committees, on the one hand, and the committees of the fighting oranisations of the working people, on the other, helped, supported and strengthened one another. The leading activists and cadres of all these organisations being Congress Socialists-cum-communists, all these activities helped the further strengthening of the Party.

While helping formation of the militant organisations of the working people and integrally connected with it, the Congress

Committee under the CSP/CPI leadership included in its activities (a) the running of night schools for the illiterate, (b) organising libraries and reading rooms for the literate, (c) study classes and short-term schools for the politically-awakened, (d) volunteer camps organised centrally by the PCC and locally by the lower-level committees of the Congress, (e) a one-month long summer school for the leading cadres of the Congress where history, political economy and political science were taught. All these activities together created a leading core of several hundreds who developed themselves as serious political activists and became socialists/communists.

With the newly-opened opportunities for legal work, we restarted the Malayalam paper *Prabhatham* which had to be stopped after a few months of its launching in 1935. This time it continued for a year and a half, i.e., till the outbreak of the war when curbs on our activities followed. I continued to be the editor but A.K. Gopalan took over as the manager-cum-organiser. He undertook a tour of Ceylon, Singapore, Malaya to enrol subscribers for the paper among the "Malayalees abroad". With that began our contacts outside India, while our participation in Congress sessions, AICC meetings in Bombay, Calcutta, etc., brought us close to Malayalees in employment outside Kerala.

As the editor of *Prabhatham*, I used to have a feature *Your Questions Answered*, in running which, I based myself on the *Congress Socialist* as well as the *National Front*, together with whatever other material could be gathered for the education of CSP/CPI cadre. A special annual number of *Prabhatham* carried articles on the basic theoretical postulates of the CSP/CPI, though our own theoretical education was of a very low level. Convey to the comrades whatever you knew—this was what we attempted in these articles and through the columns of *Prabhatham*.

The right-wing leaders of the Congress in Malabar did not like these developments. They, however, could do nothing to stop it because our work in the Congress was in full consonance with the official policy directives of the Congress High Command, while our theoretical-agitational activities through *Prabhatham* were of an independent political party. The con-

trast between what we did and what the Congress High Command declared and the practices of such Congress Committees as are dominated by the right-wing elements, was fully exposed by what the left-led Congress did in the Malabar part of Kerala.

This contrast was revealed in all its nakedness after the Congress ministry was formed in the Madras Presidency of which Malabar was then a part. The assumption of office by the ministry speeded up the process of unionisation of the wage workers and salaried employees. Calicut saw a huge demonstration of workers led by the newly-formed and/or already-existing trade unions who had prepared a charter of demands to be presented to the new (Congress) labour minister, V.V. Giri. Together with the factory workers were also school teachers who had prepared a charter of their own demands and were preparing themselves for that form of struggle which is typical of the working class—strike.

In the meanwhile, the Kisan Sabha which had been formed was resorting to militant demonstrations spelling out their demands; in some places the kisans went to the extent of deferring the payment of annual rents to the *jenmies* and using social boycott as a weapon against the oppressive *jenmies* and their minions. These forms of militant kisan struggles so infuriated the ruling classes that they raised the bogey of "anarchy", demanding "firm measures" to stop it. *Mathrubhumi*, edited by the same Kelappan who had presided over the Calicut meeting where the Kerala unit of the CSP was formed, joined the chorus, demanding "stern action" against the "anti-social activities".

The Congress ministry, however, found that repression would prove counter-productive unless coupled with some concessions to the peasants. It, therefore, appointed an enquiry committee to study the tenancy law as it existed at the time and to suggest appropriate changes. It may be relevant in this context to point out that the then revenue minister of Madras T. Prakasam, was himself chairman of a governmental committee which made fairly radical proposals in connection with the zamindari estates in Andhra. His visit to the "disturbed" areas of Malabar and the representations he received touched

sympathetic chord in his heart.

I happened to be a member of this committee which consisted of only members of the two houses of the legislature. I would not have been a member if the committee had been constituted two years or even one year earlier. For, my application for nomination as Congress candidate had been rejected twice—first in 1937 for the general election, and then in 1938 for a by-election caused by the death of a sitting MLA. Interestingly, my first application was rejected on the ground that being an "outcaste" Namboodiri, I was unpopular and, therefore, it would be difficult for me to secure votes in a conservative constituency. On the second occasion, it was said that in a predominantly Tiyya or Ezhava constituency, a Namboodiri like me would be unsuitable. It was, of course, known that the real reason was not my caste but political complexion. By 1939, however, our Party's position had become so unassailable, and the seat had been held by a high caste (though not Namboodiri) person, that they could not reject my application. I was duly nominated and returned uncontested, though efforts were made to make an "independent" Congressman fight me.

My tenure as MLA, however, was shortlived. Elected in February 1939, I attended the budget and monsoon sessions after which there was only the October session where a resolution was moved by the then Prime (later Chief) Minister, Rajaji, against India's forcible participation in war. This was the final act of the Rajaji ministry, since it tendered its resignation immediately. The Tenancy Enquiry Committee was constituted immediately after my election and, therefore, I found a place in the committee. It, however, continued till the early months of 1940 when the committee submitted its report.

The very appointment of the committee and its work helped the further growth of the peasant movement. Not only did it create enthusiasm among the peasants but the programme of tours undertaken by the committee culminated in larger than ever mobilisation around the Kisan Sabha, the left-led Congress committee and its socialist-communist leadership. All taluk centres where the committee took evidence for two to three days each, saw huge demonstrations which helped us (the three leftist members) in our work inside the committee. For me, in

particular, it was an education in how to combine the work of a legislator inside and a mass agitator outside the legislature.

By the time the report was submitted, I had gone underground. I, therefore, could not sign it along with my colleagues in the committee. I, however, had received the draft prepared by the chairman and secretary, together with the signatures of the majority of the members including the Congress MLAs and MLCs as well as the known spokesman of the *jenmies*. I could obviously not endorse it; two other (leftist) Congress MLAs, including the president of the Kerala PCC, were in my position. There were, therefore, three minutes of dissent which by and large agreed on the concrete proposals for the amendments to the legislation. My minute of dissent included, besides, a longish preamble giving the theoretical substantiation of the central demand of the kisan movement—abolition of the *jenmi* system without compensation.

This minute of dissent was the starting point of my study of socio-economic conditions in Kerala. I, however, cannot claim exclusive credit for its production. It was a follow-up of the practical and theoretical activities of the All India Kisan Sabha formed in 1936, with the CSP and the CPI as the main leadership of the organisation. Parallel to my minute of dissent in Malabar, the Kisan Sabha in Bengal had submitted a memorandum to the Land Revenue Commission. Similar activities were going on in other states about which I got a glimpse at an all-India cadre school organised at Sonepur in Bihar. From the talks given by leaders on the conditions and problems in different states, I got an idea of how to theoretically approach the agrarian problem in the *jenmi*-dominated Malabar. That I used it to the best advantage of the growing peasant movement in Malabar, is, of course, true, and to that I may modestly claim credit.

Although differently from the pattern in Malabar, a new wave of radical nationalism was sweeping the two princely states of Cochin and Travancore as well. Its origins go back to the two (1930 and 1931) Round Table Conferences where the British rulers had tried to rally the princes in what was called "Indian India" against the Congress and its demand for complete independence. The support given by the princes to the

British, however, prodded public-spirited individuals and groups all over "Indian India" to put forth the demand for responsible government which meant the adoption of the parliamentary democratic system in the states part of India.

Cochin and Travancore being two states with high rates of literacy and education, this movement took deeper roots there than elsewhere. I have already noted how the bourgeois democratic movements for socio-economic reforms started earlier and were stronger in the states part of Kerala than in Malabar. The trade union movement was also stronger. It was, therefore, possible for the CSP/CPI to extend its political influence rapidly to Cochin and Travancore, though it had begun with stronger roots in Malabar. The programmatic and policy pronouncements of the CSP, the resolutions adopted by the first Kerala Congress Socialist conference (Calicut, May 1935), etc., included the demand of ending the distinction between "British" and "Indian" India, i.e., abolition of princely rule.

With this as the ultimate aim, the CSP/CPI activists could easily join hands with those bourgeois democratic politicians who demanded "full responsible government under His (Her) Highness". The demand meant that the Diwan, appointed formally by the princely ruler but really by the British government, be replaced by an elected council of ministers who will be free from any interference either by the princely ruler or by the British "resident" or "political agent".

While developing the movement, however, its organisers—the bourgeois democratic politicians as well as the CSP/CPI—had to grapple with the ticklish problem of the alienation of backward castes in Hindu society and non-Hindu (Christian and Muslim) communities. The apprehension of these alienated groups was that a responsible government would mean the hegemony of upper caste Hindus, and this fear had to be allayed.

Thus arose the demand for reservation for the backward castes, both among the Hindus and Christians—a demand supported by the socialists, communists and radical bourgeois nationalists. It was opposed by the loyalists who raised the bogey of "communalism" against the demand for responsible government. There was, however, a difference between the

socialists and communists, on the one hand, and the radical section among the bourgeois nationalists, on the other: the former subordinated the question of reservation to the developing unity of the working class and other sections of the working people; the latter looked upon it as a "basic principle of democracy", since in the actual conditions of a caste-Hindu-dominated society like ours, they claimed that the lower caste Hindus and non-Hindus should be protected against caste Hindu domination. Bourgeois politicians belonging to the non-Hindu and backward Hindu communities considered reservation to be a "socialist demand" since, they claimed, caste conflicts are in our country the main thing, not class war. These differences, of course, did not come to the surface at that time, since the struggle for responsible government was the point of agreement among all groups of democrats.

While Cochin and Travancore shared the above features of the political situation in the respective states, they differed from each other in the course of the developing movement; the more "liberal" regime in Cochin took "the first step towards responsible government" by providing for the allocation of some portfolios to an elected minister, while the administration as a whole was kept with the Diwan. Travancore also had a dose of "liberalism"—not politically but socially; instead of having an elected minister to look after some departments as in Cochin, the Travancore regime threw the temples open to all Hindus. Both were clever tactics to divide the growing democratic movement.

From the point of view of the developing mass movement, however, the manoeuvre in Cochin was more successful: it corrupted a section of the state Congress leadership who became part of the dyarchic administration. In Travancore, on the other hand, a combination of non-Hindus and non-caste Hindus, was first formed as a "Joint Political Congress", and then converted itself into the State Congress which launched a satyagraha movement for the removal of the Diwan, Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer. However, after a few months of militant actions (in which the CSP/CPI activists were very active), it had to be withdrawn on the advice of Mahatma Gandhi according to whom the memorandum against a particular person (the

Diwan) was contrary to spirit of satyagraha.

The CSP/CPI was weaker in Travancore than in Malabar but the influence of the CSP/CPI was fairly strong in the state Congress in three ways :

Firstly, a Travancore satyagraha jatha proceeded from Malabar to Travancore under the leadership of A.K. Gopalan ; his entry into Travancore, followed by his arrest and court trial, electrified the people of Travancore. The jatha was, in fact, organised not by the KPCC as such but by a committee of leftist Congressmen with KPCC president Abdur-Rahman as chairman and treasurer, Narayan Nayar as secretary.

Secondly, dozens of experienced cadres of the CSP/CPI from Malabar took positions in various centres in Travancore, organising the underground activities of the illegal State Congress.

Above all, the CSP/CPI leadership, particularly Krishna Pillai, gave direct leadership to the historic general strike of the coir workers of Alleppey with which was integrated the strikes of workers in several other industries.

It is worth noting that the first item in the charter of demands that formed the basis of the general strike, was that of a responsible government. Furthermore, the strike was settled on the basis of an agreement which secured some economic demands (wage increase included) but only after the State Congress satyagraha was withdrawn on Mahatma Gandhi's advice.

I myself did not play any direct role in these activities. However, I was involved in the consultations that took place every few days at Cochin—the centre from where all the illegal activities of the State Congress were coordinated. I was also present at Alleppey on the occasion of the big mass rally where the coir workers made their epoch-making declaration of general strike. That very day, a coir factory was burnt down, followed by intense police repression. I had to leave Alleppey clandestinely.

The entry of the militant workers of Alleppey gave a new dimension to the State Congress movement. The militant role played by the working class in the political struggle could no more be overlooked. It is true, of course, that the working class

had not emerged as the leading class in the political movement, but yet it had become an independent force, though only in a limited sense. The main thing is that the CSP/CPI which till then had been virtually confined to Malabar, extended its political influence to Travancore. A sizeable section of rank and file State Congressmen who got disillusioned of Gandhian leadership after the withdrawal of the satyagraha movement, began to look to the CSP/CPI for leadership. Thus emerged the first all-Kerala (left) political leadership.

This chapter will remain incomplete if reference is not made to the formation of the Kerala unit of the All-India Progressive Writers' Association. Inspiration for it came from the anti-fascist unity of writers and intellectuals to which the lead came from Moscow—with Maxim Gorki at the head. In India itself, such well-known literary men and women as Premchand (who presided over the inaugural meeting), poet Tagore and poetess-politician Sarojini Naidu associated themselves with it.

In Kerala, however, the organisation did not have even the blessings—not to speak of participation—of established writers. It was, on the other hand, an organisation of left-wing political activists who dabbled in literary creation, while some (including myself) engaged themselves in literary criticism on the basis of "art for social revolution", rather than "art for art's sake". The achievement of this movement was the production of two plays solid *Arrears of Rent* and *Blood Sucking*, dedicated to kisan and industrial struggle, respectively. Staged in dozens of places, with outstanding political leaders (including A.K. Gopalan) acting in them, the two plays helped the movement forward. Important are also some of the songs sung in various conferences, rallies, demonstrations, etc. Here, indeed, was art in the service of the revolutionary movement. Although in the course of its subsequent development, the movement became controversial, it laid the basis for the demand concerning a new Kerala, that the people having the same language and culture etc. must be united in a single state.

CHAPTER II

UNDERGROUND

HAVING CONTINUED TO WORK AS A SECRETARY of the Kerala PCC for two terms (1939-40), I had to step down since I failed to get elected to the KPCC as a member in the 1940 election. Although I was personally defeated, the leftist character of the Congress leadership continued. Of the newly elected PCC members, the majority belonged to the CSP/CPI and, therefore, Mohammed Abdur-Rahman, who was president for the previous two terms with me as a secretary, continued to hold the post ; the only difference was that, instead of me, Damodaran took over as secretary. When Abdur-Rahman and Damodarn were arrested, Kunhiraman Nambiar became the president and Narayanan Nair the secretary.

My failure to get elected to the PCC in which, however, our Party with its left allies had a majority, proved to be a turning point in my life, as also in the development of the left movement in the state ; it came just after a conference of about 50 activists of the CSP in Kerala held a semi-legal meeting where it was decided to affiliate the Kerala unit of the CSP as a whole to the CPI which was then an outlawed organisation working underground. A clandestine centre of the CPI had to be set up for which the ground had already been cleared by Krishna Pillai.

When he was working in north India, Pillai had familiarised himself with the technique of clandestine organisation which he now used, on the outbreak of the war in 1939, to prepare himself and the leading party cadres for the underground organisation of the CPI. His experience in leading the Alleppey

general str ke, which had to b e organised clandestinely, stood him in good stead. He would, therefore, work as a mobile organiser of the underground centre and build a network of organisation with experienced cadre, evading arrest and keeping contact with the entire Party. I had to help him as his immobile counterpart.

This decision was taken in consultation with the central leadership because of my limitations as well as capacities. Being not resourceful enough (as Pillai was) to move about clandestinely and, besides, easy to be detected by the police because of my stammering, I could not be mobile; my capacity to put things to writing would, however, help the functioning of the illegal centre of the state unit of the Party. I had, therefore, to follow Pillai and go underground but remain at the centre. It was with very great diffidence, and as a matter of discipline, that I carried out the decision that I should go underground.

My going underground was itself a new experience; so were the first few weeks when I had to acclimatise myself to the new surrounding. It was, in fact, the beginning of a new life for me. A comrade who was given detailed instructions by Krishna Pillai took me on foot, by train and bus from my home in south Malabar and handed me over to a comrade in Wynad (north Malabar). The comrade who took me over, put me up for two days with a comrade whose home was a "safe shelter" for me. I was then taken in a truck to a "safe" place where I stayed for a full month.

For the first time in my life, I was getting acquainted with the life of those whom Mahatma Gandhi called *Daridra Narayan*. Translated into the more modern language of classes and strata, my hosts belonged to the semi-proletarian rural poor—a toddy-tapper's family to be exact. From then on, for nearly six months, I was shifted from one place to another. Sharing their food, looked after by them, escorted from place to place by reliable comrades, I came close to the poor and lower middle classes in a part of Malabar. Those were the days of my apprenticeship before I was to be converted from the member of a high caste landlord family into the adopted son of the working people of Kerala.

During this period, I had no specific work since, as noted

earlier, the major part of the political activities of the Party was being done legally by comrades who were working in Congress committees. The only activity carried on in the name of the Party was filling the walls in the villages and towns with posters—a job done by scores of comrades who did it with great credit to the Party and to themselves. I personally was far removed from both these activities. Sitting in the underground "shelters" and "dens" which housed the illegal "Party centre" for the state, I had virtually nothing to do except to study a few books on the theory of Marxism-Leninism with which my acquaintance till then was meagre.

Things, however, changed rapidly when, at the call of the Kerala PCC which still had a leftist majority, September 15, 1940 was observed as a day to protest the repressive measures adopted by the British Government against the anti-war activities of the Congrese, its left wing in particular. The rightist leaders of the Congress were hostile to this move but could do nothing since it was against that very attitude of the British Government which the Congress had raised its voice of protest against. They, therefore, did nothing till the day was over.

The observance of the day was, outwardly, in protest against the British Government's policy. In reality, however, it gave expression as much against the weak-kneed policy of compromise with the British rulers adopted by the Congress leadership. While the goverenment had already arrested a large number of top and middle-ranking Congress leaders who were rotting in jail, the only symbolic protest from the Congress was the individual satyagraha by satyagrahis carefully selected by the Mahatma himself. Side by side with this symbolic protest were the spate of statements made officially by the Congress "High Command" offering cooperation to the British in their war efforts on condition that the political demands formulated by the Congress were conceded. This symbolic "protest" of the Congress was, in other words, the very cover behind which a negotiated settlement with the British was to be facilitated.

Organised as they were under these circumstances, the protest demonstrations all over Malabar turned out to be unprecedentedly militant. The demonstrators and the police clashed in three places, leading to the death of half a dozen people, including a

police officer. These developments were used by the Government to clamp widespread repression on the people. The Congress High Command, for its part, used the very same developments as an excuse to dissolve the left-led Kerala PCC and nominate an ad hoc committee to take over the organisation.

On the day of the incident, I was "sheltered", along with Krishna Pillai, in a house only a few yards away from the scene of the clash which ended in the death of a police officer. After making immediate arrangements to shift me away to a "safer shelter", Krishna Pillai made his own arrangements to escape arrest. Moving from one "shelter" to another in the next few days, I came to know of what was happening to those who were being hunted and arrested. Sitting in one of my "safe shelters", I saw a batch of armed policemen headed by their officer march along the footpath on the side whereof my "safe shelter" stood. I had the experience also of being "sheltered" by a family who was related to one of the policeman killed in the clash; the lady of the house even went to the deceased's family to offer condolences. In less than a month and a half, however—on October 29, to be exact—I came to be deposited in a toddy-tapper's family which was to "shelter" me for a year and a half. It was to that family that I dedicated my first short booklet in English, *A Short History of the Peasant Movement in Kerala*, published after we came overground.

Having been settled in relatively stable conditions, I could from now on plan to make my shelter a real illegal party centre. This became all the more necessary because, having lost control of the KPCC, we had no open avenue of communication with our comrades. Under the general direction of the central headquarters of the Party in Bombay—directly and through Sundarayya—Krishna Pillai had made foolproof arrangements for weekly communications from the underground centre to *taluk* units and vice versa. I was to be in charge of this centre, receiving and answering letters. I was also to receive and answer communications from the all-India centre which were expected to come once a few weeks. An illegally operating cyclostyling machine was to serve the purpose of producing a weekly party letter which kept party units informed of major

developments.

A calamity had in the meanwhile taken place. Krishna Pillai who was a tower of strength to all of us but who was always on the move, was accidentally arrested. On hearing the shocking news, I felt thoroughly helpless but was soon heartened by two things : firstly, Sundarayya came to my "shelter", stayed with me for two days, explained to me how I should function from the Party centre. He asked me to take over as state secretary—a position which had been held by Krishna Pillai. His detailed explanation of how I could contribute to the work of the centre, at last dispelled my apprehensions even though I did not have those qualities which Pillai had. I continued to work, as he had directed, from Deccember 1940 to May 1942.

The second factor which gave me courage was the discovery that a virtually foolproof network had already been created before Pillai was arrested. Selected comrades who were with us in the days of legality and had amassed experience in party work (legal and illegal) had been chosen to take the place of any one of us (Pillai and myself included) who came to be arrested. I had not bothered myself till then to find out who they were and how they worked. Now that Pillai was no more at my side, I came to know some of them (not all) and found that an apparatus had been built up which would work even in Pillai's absence.

This was a period full of significant developments internationally, nationally and in our own Party's life. The military offensive launched by Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union and the entry of Japan on the side of the German-Italian fascists completely transformed the world situation which had its impact on India's national political life too. The Communist Party of India, too, was caught in the ideological dilemma arising out of the fact that our national enemy, i.e., British imperialism, became an ally of the leader of the international vanguard of the revolution, the USSR, to which our Party was loyal.

How our own inner-Party life was affected by these developments will be explained in the following chapters. What I am doing here is only to relate what contribution I made to the further development of the Party in those difficult days. It will

be relevant to point out here that, though the formal charge against me was trivial—the writing of a preface to a Malayalam biography of martyr Jatin Das—I was a declared absconder with an offer of Rs. 10,000 to anybody who would hand me over to the police. The son of my host in the shelter who had not known who I was, recognised me on seeing the advertisement in which I had been described as a "stammer". Although thus recognised by my hosts, the family never betrayed and sheltered me for several months more.

I was not alone, sitting in one centre, but used to meet a handful of comrades—political functionaries as well as those who operated the organisational-technical work of the Party centre. I had occasional, though regular, discussions with the comrades who functioned politically. Those whom I could not meet, used to write to me raising political questions as well as keeping me informed of all (political and organisational) developments in their respective areas. The organisational-technical apparatus which helped me in all this, consisted of comrades who collected and passed on to me newspapers, books, letters, etc., which gave me the raw material required for the weekly party letter. Those very comrades also took from me the letters in reply to what had come to me during the week, the matter for the party letter, and escorted me to the "shelters" where I was to meet and exchange views with other comrades.

There was, besides, the cyclostyling machine used to produce the weekly party letter which was supplemented, after a while, with a clandestinely-operating hand press for producing printed material. The Malayalam translation of the first few chapters of *History of the CPSU(B)*—a text book recommended for us to study so as to convert the left bourgeois nationalists into communists—was printed in it.

The routinised part of my work did not take more than a day or two in the week. A couple of days in the month had to be set apart for travel to and back from other "shelters" for discussions with comrades. I, therefore, had plenty of time for a study of the Marxist classics with which I was till then only insufficiently familiar. The classics brought out from Moscow, however, were not available. What I could get were mainly publications from England. *A Handbook of Marxism*, edited by

Emile Burns, helped me a lot. It began with the *Communist Manifesto* and ended with *The Programme of the Communist International*. In between the two were copious extracts from other classics, including *Capital*, nearly 300 pages. Available were also the 12 volumes of Lenin's *Selected Works*. Together with some of the earlier published Indian editions of Marx-Engels' works, these English publications threw open before me a window to the world of Marxist-Leninist theory.

Equally important were some works of fiction depicting life in the Soviet Union, proletarian and general democratic struggles in capitalist countries, etc. Books on underground life in Nazi Germany, guerilla operations in Nazi-occupied Europe and in Japanese-occupied China were also available. Stories like those of martyred Komsomol girl Zoya (Tania) were exhilarating. Reading them uplifted me emotionally, while the study of whatever Marxist classics I could get hold of, transformed me intellectually. Conveying to our comrades what I gathered from this vast literature (in however humble a way it could be done) became my passion in life.

The left bourgeois journalism which I had started with in my student days and continued in the CSP/CPI days of open activity, was slowly being turned into illegal communist journalism. The uninterrupted production of the weekly party letter for a year and a half and the illegal printing of a few chapters of *The History of the CPSU(B)* were the solid achievements of this period. It showed that, as opposed to the symbolic individual satyagraha of the Congress, a new form of resistance to imperialism, was coming up. It was, of course, too weak to exert any lasting impact on the course of the freedom movement. It was, however, a clear alternative to the bourgeois leadership's politics of bargaining for a compromise with British imperialism—the alternative of mass action for the overthrow of the British rulers.

An incident worth mentioning in this context is what has come to be known as the Kayyur episode. Following the policy of intense repression launched by the government, there was a clash between the militant demonstrators and the police in a village (Kayyur) in the present-day Kasergode district. A policeman was stoned by the demonstrators and, while trying to

escape, he jumped into the river and got drowned. A case was launched which ended in the award of death sentence on four who were executed in March 1943.

This very period of my underground life coincided with some complicated developments which created certain political obstacles in the way of our Party developing as the vanguard of the anti-imperialist struggle. Their immediate organisational consequence, however, was that our Party which had to work underground for two years (1940-42) began to get a semi-legal status to begin with, and in the end we got our legality back, though with limitations. It became possible, first, to organise open demonstrations and rallies against the Japanese aggressors, bring out some legal pamphlets and booklets, etc., and then, to make preparations for the subsequent bringing out of a legal weekly in Calicut. This was in keeping with the decision of the Central Committee to open a legal office in Bombay, start a weekly in English, *People's War*, with Hindi, Urdu, Marathi and Gujarati editions from Bombay itself. Papers in other Indian languages were to be brought out by state committees, the Malyalam *Deshabhimani* being one of them.

It was when these preparations had reached an advanced stage that I shifted from my underground "shelter" to another "shelter" near Calicut which was considered the appropriate place for starting open activities of the Party. I had to remain "underground" for a few weeks more, i.e., till definite information arrived that the warrant issued against me was withdrawn. That information came on August 2, 1942, the day on which a public meeting was held in the town hall in memory of Lokmanya Tilak. I made my first public appearance at that meeting, was arrested at the end of the meeting but released within a couple of hours since, on enquiry, the police found that the warrant against me had been withdrawn. I was now a free man, once again in a position to carry on open political activities.

CHAPTER 12

FROM IMPERIALIST TO PEOPLE'S WAR

WHEN IT BECAME KNOWN THAT, AFTER GRABbing the entire western Europe and parts of eastern Europe, Nazi Germany attacked the USSR, I instinctively felt that the Soviet Red Army would, in the end, beat back the Nazis. This conclusion emerged not on the basis of any concrete knowledge of the military situation which I did not have anyway. I was moved only by faith. Had not the first socialist state in the world shown its remarkable capacity to bring about such a speedy development of its economy as had amazed even cynics? It would, therefore, undoubtedly survive the furious military onslaught launched from the West. The stories of Nazi advance deep into the territory of the USSR, forcing the Red Army to withdraw all along the line, of course, caused concern but did not shake my faith in the final triumph of the Red Army.

As for the impact of the new turn in the course of the Second World War on our own freedom struggle, I did not imagine that we would have to give any second thought to our approach to the British government's war efforts. We were, of course, interested in the victory of the USSR and its allies in the anti-fascist war. But how could we, the Indian people, bound hand and foot by the British rulers, join the struggle against fascism on the world level so along as our freedom was not recognised, our national demand for complete independence not conceded? After all, our criticism of the Congress leadership was that efforts were being made by them to come to terms with Britain, that they were prepared to compromise on the national

demand. Continuing our struggle against these compromising policies of the Congress leaders, I thought, would be the best contribution to the mobilisation of the Indian people behind the heroic Soviet people.

This was in full consonance with the stand taken by the all-India leadership of the Party. Only about six months later, round about December, did I learn about what came to be known as the "Deoli documents". Prepared by a few comrades who were in detention in Deoli Camp jail (Rajasthan), the documents demanded a change in policy. It was pointed out that, with the first socialist country in the world engaged in a titanic war for its very existence, the outcome of the war would decide the future of all countries, including ours. In the meantime, the comrades who were working at the clandestine Party centre in Bombay received a letter also from the fraternal Communist Party of Great Britain making more or less the same plea. Having considered both the documents, they self-criticised themselves for having fallen into the left bourgeois nationalist deviation and corrected the line pursued by the Party (at the centre and in the states) since the Nazi offensive began.

Looking back into the process of self-criticism and correction, it is clear now the new line was not faultless. That the Nazi attack on the USSR had completely changed the world situation was, of course, correct, but the post-war world as envisaged was too rosy : while correctly noting the heightened prestige with which the USSR would emerge victorious from the end of the anti-fascist war, it underestimated the capacity of imperialism—those imperialist powers which were the allies of the USSR in the anti-fascist war—to fight back. The "cold war" that followed the end of the anti-fascist war did not fit into the framework of the idea incorporated in the new document that, with the entry of the USSR in the war, imperialism had become a "prisoner" of the revolutionary forces of the world.

Though thus exaggerated and onesided, the assessment of the new world situation was essentially sound. The demarcation between two groups of imperialist powers, one of which relied, for the very survival of their countries as independent and sovereign nations, on the might of the Soviet Union, showed that a

new correlation of forces had emerged in the international class war. The world revolutionary forces could no more be unconcerned with the outcome of the war. Which of the two rival sides would emerge as victor and who the vanquished was, in fact, a question of great importance for us. The victory of one grouping—the grouping of which the USSR was a partner—and the defeat of the other, was in the interest of the preservation of freedom of those who were free and the winning of freedom for those who were not.

We, who were national revolutionaries rapidly turning proletarian revolutionaries, were however, educated on two concepts. "The enemy of our national enemy is our ally" was the concept on which national revolutionaries of the bourgeois/petty bourgeois class character had always acted. That was how the Ghadar Party and other revolutionary groups acted during the First World War. That was the motivation of those groups of national revolutionaries in India who, after the end of the war and the Russian Revolution, went to the Soviet Union, which they saw as the most reliable among the enemies of India's national enemy. That was, finally, the perspective with which, during the Second World War itself, Subhash Bose left India, first reaching Germany and then Japan, and marched to India leading the Indian National Army in alliance with the Japanese militarists.

Those of us who were converting ourselves into proletarian revolutionaries had, besides, been educated on the concept of "transforming the imperialist war into civil war"—the direction given by Lenin to the Russian revolutionaries and the revolutionary working class parties and groups in all capitalist countries. I myself had in my underground "den" been studying Lenin's works pertaining to the First World War and the uncompromising fight he put up against the social chauvinists of the Second International. These were used in whatever theoretical and agitational material was produced by me for the Party.

What was missing here was the basic difference between the circumstances in which the two (First and Second) World Wars had broken out. The first war, as clearly pointed out by Lenin, was intended to re-divide the globe among the imperialist powers themselves. As opposed to the social chauvinists of the Second

International who rallied behind their respective bourgeoisie. Lenin called on the revolutionary proletarians of all countries to "transform the imperialist war into a civil war." This was practised in some countries but succeeded only in Russia.

The Second World War, on the other hand, broke out when there were not only the two rival groupings of imperialist powers but also a socialist power. Both groupings of imperialist powers were equally opposed to the socialist power, equally interested in destroying it, but differed on how to destroy it, how to rearrange the world after destroying the socialist power. The diplomatic and military measures of the socialist Soviet Union were calculated to derive maximum advantage out of the rivalry between the two groups of imperialist powers and secure maximum support from the proletarian and national liberation revolutionary forces throughout the world.

This was the rationale behind the Soviet-German pact of non-aggression signed on the eve of the Second World War. It foiled the game of the western imperialist powers to make Nazi Germany and the USSR fight and destroy each other, so that they could dominate the new post-war world. Having been defeated by the Nazi hordes first, the western powers were forced to join the USSR in a great anti-fascist coalition by the time the USSR came under attack. The USSR, for its part, required the support of all countries who were fighting either to defend their national independence or (as in the case of colonial, semi-colonial and dependent countries) to secure it.

This was the essence of the call given four years before the outbreak of the war, by the Communist International whose Seventh Congress was held in Moscow in 1935. Making a concrete analysis of the economic and political crisis of world capitalism, the Congress defined fascism as the most reactionary form of the class rule of the bourgeoisie. Under whatever circumstances it might break out, the Congress pointed out, the war would eventually be turned against the USSR. The defence of the freedom and sovereignty of every country was therefore inseparably connected with the outcome of the war.

Hence, the Seventh Congress called for a broad united front

of all anti-fascist forces in which not only the people but also the ruling classes of every country threatened by the fascist powers, would participate. Closely linked with this anti-fascist front was the anti-imperialist united front in the colonial, semi-colonial and dependent countries. This was the basis on which the Congress Socialists and communists in our country sought, in cooperation with left-oriented Congressmen headed by Nehru to develop the Congress as an anti-imperialist united front.

The implications of this analysis of the world situation in which the Second World War broke out, were not fully grasped by the communists in several countries, India being one of them. Drawing a parallel between the First and Second World Wars, we tended to describe the outbreak of the latter along the lines of Lenin's characterisation of the First World War—a war fought between two rival groupings of imperialist powers for a redivision of the world, a war in which the national and proletarian revolutionaries were not interested. The tactic worked out was to consider "the enemy of our national enemy"—fascism—not exactly as a friend or an ally, but not as the reactionary force against which all anti-imperialist forces were to be mobilised. Only when Hitler's army turned against the Soviet Union, turning our national enemy, Britain, into an ally of the Soviet Union, did the communists in India see something new which however confused them. Before them was a difficult choice : either carry on the struggle against our national enemy which hinders the defence efforts of the anti-fascist coalition or extend support to the anti-fascist powers and get isolated among the anti-imperialist masses in the country.

The Party leadership, after experimenting with the first alternative for six months, chose the second in December 1941. By that time, the content of the war, its theatre of operation, had undergone a vital change. Instead of being a purely anti-fascist war being fought in Europe, it became a war against the Italian-German armies in Europe and against Japan in Asia.

This brought the war to the threshold of India. Having overpowered the whole of east and south-east Asia, the Japanese army reached the eastern borders of India; there was, besides, the grim possibility of the European fascist armies from the west and the Japanese army from the east, linking up on Indian

soil. Had that happened, it would have been a further setback to, rather than new advances in, our struggle for freedom.

It was against this international background that a section of the bourgeois leadership of the freedom movement, the one led by Subhash Bose, linked forces with the Japanese militarists. The other section headed by Gandhi, Patel, etc., used this situation to launch a nationwide mass movement to force the British rulers to concede the national demand. As opposed to both these sections of the bourgeois leadership of the freedom movement, the Party raised the slogan of "people's war" which involved a basic critique of the way the British rulers were organising their war efforts. Though they were objectively interested in rousing the patriotic instincts of the Indian people and mobilising them for the war efforts, the British refused to take the necessary political steps to mobilise the people. Resisting the demand of the leaders of the freedom movement for a declaration that India should be made free and sovereign at the end of the war, pending which, for mobilising the people for the war a national government should be formed at the centre, Prime Minister Churchill, on behalf of the British government, arrogantly declared that nothing would be done. The policy of repression against the Quit India movement in the meantime continued.

Our struggle to make the anti-fascist war a real people's war, therefore, included a struggle against this policy of the British rulers. Balancing between the two—mobilising the people behind the anti-fascist forces led by the Soviet Union and fighting the anti-India arrogance of the British rulers—was a difficult task which the Party had to undertake.

The confusion that arose out of the new world situation, however, was not confined to the communists. Congressmen headed by Nehru, Azad, etc., were also in a dilemma. The Congress pronouncements since the 1936 (Lucknow) session had placed them officially in the anti-fascist camp. It was this official position that was used in the first stage of the war—till the Nazis launched their military offensive against the USSR—to offer support to Britain on condition that a national government be formed. The arrogant rejection of that demand by the British authorities made the ranks restless. The Communist

Party had, in fact, emerged as a militant vanguard of the anti-imperialist movement, thus providing an alternative to the Congress leadership.

The entry of the Soviet Union into the war gave the Congress leaders an opportunity to continue their policy of offering conditional support to the war efforts of Britain, since it helped the Soviet Union and China to beat back the German and Japanese aggressors. They, therefore, got busy negotiating not only with the British rulers but also their American, Chinese and other allies. The British, however, were adamant and would not think of any honourable compromise with the Congress. Coming as this did against the background of a steadily worsening war situation, when the allies needed support from whichever quarter it was possible to secure, the Congress leaders thought that the British would be forced to rethink the entire situation if—and only if—a threat was held out that the Congress would launch a countrywide struggle.

This could not initially create any enthusiasm in that section of the leadership which included Nehru, Abul Kalam Azad, etc., who were concerned with its consequences to the Soviet Union, China and other anti-imperialist forces. There was, however, no other way, it was felt, to knock some sense into the heads of the British rulers. Though initially unwilling, Nehru, Azad, etc., therefore, came round to the line of launching the Quit India movement, with the Mahatma giving the slogan "Do or Die" in the "final battle" and giving up, for the first time in his long political career, the insistence on non-violence : his general direction that "every Indian should be his or her own leader" made participants in the struggle do what they liked.

While the Congress leaders were engaged in the negotiations preceding the launching of the Quit India movement, the Communist Party was also carrying on negotiations—for the lifting of the ban on the Party, release of prisoners, withdrawal of warrants on the comrades, etc. These were partially conceded, enabling the Party to open its central office in Bombay, the Kerala office in Calicut, etc., and start weekly papers at the centre and in the states. It was as a result of this that I came overground and, as noted earlier, was arrested but released after a couple of hours. I then proceeded to Bombay, just in

time to be around when the fateful AICC meeting was taking place—the meeting which gave the call for the Quit India struggle.

That was the first time when the Party was having a legal office located in a big building where the General Secretary P.C. Joshi, along with P.B. members, Adhikari and Ghosh, worked. I was heartily welcomed and remained there for a week. By the time I had to come back, the "short and swift struggle" which Sardar Patel had called to force the British to concede the national demand, had enveloped the country in utter chaos and confusion. The train by which I had to travel took a circuitous route, taking three days in place of two to cover the distance from Bombay to Madras, from where I rushed to Kottayam to join my wife and the three year-old daughter whom I had left behind 27 months ago.

When had gone underground in April 1940, I was known to the majority of my friends as a left Congressman, a socialist, impatient of the non-violent forms of struggle adopted by the Congress led by Mahatma Gandhi. Now I came "overground" as a communist, the government having withdrawn the warrant issued against me earlier, and the Party of which I had become a known member had been permitted to work legally. Few of my friends could understand all this.

This was illustrated by a visit to me in the Bombay office by three friends who were my leftist colleagues earlier. They came seeking cooperation in organising the Quit India movement. "Your vast experience in underground work will be invaluable", they pleaded. They did not know that my experience was of a struggle basically different from what they had in mind. Having left me when I pleaded inability, they came to be involed in a bomb case during the Quit India movement in Malabar. All of us in the Communist Party were accused of "betraying" such organisers of the Quit India movement. Coming out after 27 months of underground life was obviously the beginning of a period when we would be put to still more serious trials, though for the first time in its history the Party was permitted to work as a legal entity.

CHAPTER 13

THE AGONY OF ATTACHMENT AND SEPARATION

REJOINING THE FAMILY AFTER 27 MONTHS OF underground life was strictly not comparable with a similar home-coming nine years earlier. The mother from whom I was separated for 19 months in 1932-33, did not live for more than three years after we were rejoined. The wife who came 15 months after the mother left, had just begun family life when we were separated.

But the beginning and the end of the two separations were almost identical. It was with a heavy heart, but urged by the sense of duty to the country and the people, that I had left my ageing mother in 1932, as I left my young wife and our baby daughter in 1940. Lacking courage to face the situation, I left on both occasions without taking my nearest and dearest into confidence that I would be away for some time—neither they nor I knew for how long.

Separation broke my mother's heart in 1932. I had an inkling of it from a letter I received from her. Written by a friend of the family with whom mother shared her feelings—she was unable to write the letter herself—the letter pained and at the same time encouraged me. It gave full expression to her agony at the separation but showed that she had nothing but concern for my health. The motherly tenderness which was clear in the text of the letter, made me regret at having caused such agony to her but did not deter me from the path I had chosen.

Reunion on my release in September 1933 was as unexpected as the separation earlier. Nobody knew of my release till I

reached home. The couple of minutes that mother and I spent together, to begin with, were highly emotional and, also, quite embarassing to me. Suppressing all her feelings and shedding a few of tears, she asked me a single question: "Will you leave me again ?" The rational person in me could not give the assurance that I would not: I had chosen my path of revolutionary activity which, I knew, might lead to a repetition of what had just then happened ; but the emotional element in my personality prodded me to give my word of honour that I would always be with her throughout her life.

I was, in fact, able to keep my promise but, alas, under circumstances which, I wish, had not developed: Mother died less than three years after our reunion. I was released on August 31, 1933, and reached home on September 1; while mother died somewhere in the latter half of July 1936. During this short period, I had become a target of police surveillance, our residence being raided once or twice for prohibited literature. Another stint of jail life or (as, in fact, happened) a term of underground activity, would certainly have broken her completely. Could I have borne the shock if something like that had happened ?

The short period that elapsed between our reunion and final separation, however, proved satisfactory to her as well as to me. With the comforting thought that I would always be by her side, she stood with me through thick and thin. Reciprocating her affection and tenderness, I looked after her till the end came.

At the time of the division of the property (1935), I was unmarried, while three brothers (one direct and two-half brothers) were married. The eldest brother had four children and his wife ; the two other brothers had only their wives but no children. One of the four brothers, therefore, got six shares ; the other two only two shares, and the unmarried brother (myself) and mother, one each. A suggestion was made to me to get married so that I, too, could get two shares. I declined the suggestion, saying I would not get married for property.

Mother, in fact, had wanted me to get married. Was it because she wanted me to get two-thirteenths share of the family property, rather than the one-thirteenth which I actually got ? I

do not know. If that were her real motive, it would have been only natural for a lady of her social background. But from the way she talked to relatives, in my hearing, about some prospective brides (in fact, naming among them my future wife), I had a feeling that her eagerness to get me settled as a family man took precedence over the share of property. In any case, sensing my disinclination, she did not press it on me.

Those were the years when big changes were taking place in my life—private as well as public. Our joint family was breaking up, the land and other properties were being divided. Together with mother, her elder son and daughter-in-law, I was setting myself up in a temporary abode, pending the construction of new houses for ourselves. Mother did not live till the construction was completed and we could move in.

Leaving the original home of the family where she had spent nearly half-a-century, was truly heart-breaking. Coming to it as a young, twelve-year-old bride, she was now leaving it as a grandmother of several girls and boys. During the major part of this nearly half-a-century, she was the mistress of the house, exercising unchallenged authority over everything in the family. She was now leaving all that and getting a temporary abode in somebody else's house. It was in this temporary abode that she spent her last years and breathed her last.

Why did she do this ? To be with her son (me) in her last days. She knew that the path I had chosen—radical social reforms plus intense political activity—was at odds with the values and standards which guided my eldest (half) brother (the head of the family). Relations were becoming strained on questions of family property also. It was, therefore, thought that speedy division of the family property, with each of the brothers living separately, was the best course for everybody. The document pertaining to division of the family property was duly registered and the four of us left the traditional abode of the family.

I was in the meanwhile getting more and more involved in political activity. I had repeatedly to be away from home on some work or other, but everytime I took care to come back soon to be with mother. This gave her immense satisfaction. Although she did not understand what I was doing, she found

me among the frontrankers among those whom I mingled and worked with—a remark she made to people close to her.

Even before the shock of separation that she had she received on my arrest, mother was not keeping good health. My jail life made it still worse. My coming back did not lead to any improvement ; her health had rather deteriorated. In fact, she had a presentiment that the end was coming. She expressed a desire in February, 1936, when she was about to complete her 59th year, that the poor should be fed on her birthday. "I may not live till my next birthday"; she said ; that was the prediction made by her astrologer ! The presentiment unfortunately proved correct : she died the following July—full seven months before the completion of her sixty years.

Mother's death naturally affected me. As an ordinary son, I would have been affected still more on being told that I should not participate in her funeral. If I did, I was told, my eldest brother (the head of the family who, incidentally, was not a direct brother but the son of father's second wife) would not cooperate. I, however, was not perturbed. Not only did I not desire a scene being created on the issue of mother's burial, but I was happy that I had been with her in her last days when she wanted to be with me. Tenderness towards, and serving mother when she was alive, was more important for me than participation in her burial.

It was 15 months after mother's death that I got married. A sixteen-year-old girl—12 years junior to me—entered my life in place of the sixty-year-old lady who had left it. Whose suffering was more intense : the mother's or the wife's ? I cannot say. In one sense, mother's was less intense : she had suffered only one instalment of my jail life for 19 months and, moreover, knew where I was. For my wife, on the other hand, the 27 months of separation (and she did not know where I was) was only the beginning. Another and still longer separation (1948-52, when I again went underground) for full four years, followed by a number of other trials, was still awaiting her.

During the 27 months of my first underground life, I did not even once meet my wife or the baby daughter. Only once I wrote her a letter. She was, in the meanwhile, getting scared by the rumours going their rounds, which made her wonder

whether she would ever be able to meet me. With the only source of solace—the presence of our baby daughter—she spent her days.

My underground life was quite unexpected and shocking, not only for my wife but for her mother and brother as well. They knew my background and would not have been surprised if I had once again been imprisoned. A still more serious development of my underground life was that the properties which had come to me when the family properties were shared among us brothers, were attached by the government in pursuance of the warrant issued against me. Evading the warrant of arrest as I was, I was declared an offender with a reward of Rs. 10,000 to anybody who found me out and helped my capture. The attachment of properties belonging to me was part of the government's drive to get me arrested.

The withdrawal of the warrant against me, of course, led to the release of the attached properties. But the very fact of attachment had made my wife's relatives see the risk that faced them out of the marriage that they had themselves arranged. Added to it was the fact that, as soon as the properties were released from attachment, I had them sold, handing over the money received to the Party.

My wife's relatives had been happy and contented when they gave her in marriage to me five years ago. Coming from a respectable family and having the reputation of being an intelligent young man, I certainly was a match for the girl. The head of the family (my would-be brother-in-law) was a supporter of the social reform movement of which I was an active participant, developing into one of its leaders. A man of worldly wisdom, he was also tolerant of my politics. The fairly long underground life, followed by the act of my giving up all properties, was beyond his comprehension. He was, in fact, infuriated.

My wife, however, did not share her brother's (and other relatives') feelings. Her happiness at our reunion gained supremacy over everything else. She accompanied me first to Calicut and then to Bombay—the two headquarters from where I operated as a Party wholetimer, assisting the activities of the Party in the Kerala state and at the all-India centre. She supported me in my giving up the properties. She shared my

life in Calicut, Bombay and, later, Delhi and Trivandrum. Having full faith that, despite having obligations to the Party and the people, I would protect her, she stood by me.

But, as years rolled on and difficulties mounted, she started suffering more and more. Not because I had "squandered" the properties, as the relatives alleged, but because she could not have a stable family life. My centre of activities being shifted from Kerala to the Party centre and back again, the responsible jobs I had to carry out being changed from one to another, she could not have the type of family life which is the dream of every young girl getting married and ageing into motherhood and grandmotherhood.

A famous Malayalam poet puts into the mouth of one of his female characters the words : "they praise me for being this and that. How I wish I were none of these but an ordinary woman who is able to live with her husband." This may well express my wife's thought after half-a-century of our married life. The twenty-seven months of my first underground life was only the beginning.

One's mother and wife, of course, stand at different levels ; the two are incomparable. I, however, compare my mother and wife: in spite of all differences, they shared the common agony of attachment to and separation from me. Close to me in life and emotions, they were yet distant because my outlook on life and practices was different from those of both.

CHAPTER 14

THE FIRST PARTY CONGRESS

HARDLY HAD A YEAR ELAPSED AFTER THE PARTY secured legality in July 1942, when its first Congress was held in Bombay in May 1943.

The conference held in Kanpur (1925) was no more than a heroic effort to form the party on Indian soil (as distinct from the Tashkent meeting of 1920 where the formation of the CPI abroad was announced). The Party that was set up at that conference could not have a stable leadership, partly because of repression at the hands of British rulers but, equally important, because it could not bring about ideological and political cohesion among the scattered groups of communists.

The weaknesses were overcome only in 1933-34 when the leadership of the Communist International gave a hand in unifying the groups that were at odds with one another. Within days of its coming into existence, however, the Party was declared illegal ; its leaders and activists could function legally as *communists* but not as members of a formally constituted Communist Party. Now that the Party had gained formal legality, it was possible to formalise its public and legal existence.

It was at the same time necessary to hold the congress openly because the Party was under fire from broad anti-imperialist political circles. The declaration of the Quit India struggle by the Bombay session of the AICC, the wholesale arrest of the Congress leaders that followed, the countrywide mass protest in which the people engaged themselves, its development into sabotage of the government's war effort—such was

the political background against which the Party's characterisation of the war as a *people's war* had evoked the ire of the anti-imperialist masses. The experience of "swimming against the national current" had to be reviewed and properly assessed.

The Bombay congress was preceded by state conferences, the one in my home state of Kerala having been held at Calicut in March. In none of these conferences, nor in the Bombay congress, however, was there any real and serious discussion. The line adopted earlier by the leadership was duly approved in the formal sense. It was taken for granted that the Party being committed to proletarian internationalism, it was its duty to subordinate India's own national struggle to the international struggle ; those who had doubts on the question were inflamed by bourgeois nationalist passions rather than guided by proletarian internationalism. There was naturally no dissenting voice in any of the state conferences or at the Bombay congress.

The nine months' experience of "swimming against the current" of nationalism had, in fact, hardened the attitude of the Party leadership. The main report delivered by the General Secretary, Joshi, and the speeches that followed, gave the line of "struggle against the Japanese agents", increase in the production of industrial and agricultural commodities, etc. Whatever the sophistication with which the line was explained, it amounted to a softening of the Party's anti-imperialism in politics and militancy in economic struggles.

The state conferences and the national congress, in fact, did not have any—not to speak of serious—discussions on the correctness of the line, they were only the media for propagating the line evolved by the Party leadership. The reports and speeches delivered in the hall, the rallies held at the conclusion of the congress and, above all, the cultural programme of songs, dances, plays, folk arts, etc., which were meticulously organised, proved to be effective weapons against the "conscious agents" as well as the "the misguided patriots" who acted as the tools of the former. The overall effect was that the tens of thousands of the committed supporters of the Party and the few thousands of its active cadres got the courage and confidence that the political adversaries of the Party could be fought back.

Looking back on that political phenomenon, full four decades since then, one has, of course, to admit the shortcomings that had crept into the Party that was supposed to be modelled on the Bolshevik Party. Although emotionally attached to proletarian internationalism, it had lost a good deal of ground among the anti-imperialist masses in the country; it was thought inevitable that, while sticking to proletarian internationalism, erosion would certainly take place in the Party's base among the anti-imperialist masses. Being an integral part of the international movement, Indian communists should not be afraid of isolation in their own country's anti-imperialist movement if that was the price for doing their duty to the first land of socialism which was facing the gravest hour of its life.

Added to this political understanding (which, as is clear to us now, was incorrect from the point of view of proletarian internationalism itself) was the distorted organisational understanding that the "iron discipline" which is the hallmark of a communist party means unquestioning loyalty to the leadership whose directives are to be ungrudgingly carried out. There was no criticism and self-criticism, an integral part of that inner-party democracy on whose basis alone genuine centralisation and iron discipline can be built.

One may be surprised how, with such an obviously incorrect understanding of politics and so un-communistic a line of organisation, the Party could not only survive the furious offensive launched by its political adversaries but grow in the years of the Quit India struggle.

The reason is that, though in a distorted way, the line spelt out earlier by the Central Committee and endorsed by the Party congress was fully in tune with all that had been advanced in the anti-imperialist movement. Sympathy for the Soviet Union, concern for its security and its very existence, was inseparably connected with the ideology evolved in the very freedom movement which had given the call for Quit India struggle. Many of those who represented this trend in the freedom movement, therefore, could not for long remain anti-communist but were bound to subsequently come back to their earlier position. As for the mass of supporters of the CPI, their intellectual and

emotional attachment to the USSR and the CPSU were still further strengthened.

For those like me who were slowly but steadily being pushed from bourgeois radicalism and nationalism to proletarian internationalism, the years of the Quit India struggle were a period of test. For the first time in our life, we were breaking our bonds (ideologically and practically) with the Gandhi-Nehru leadership under whose shadow we had grown to political maturity. It was no ordinary thing that we openly came out against the policy of the national leadership with our own perspective of freedom struggle (in alliance with the international anti-fascist front) as opposed to the perspective of the bourgeois leadership (bargaining with imperialism on the basis of the Quit India struggle). That the bulk of the anti-imperialist masses did not understand us (in fact, misunderstood us) did not detract from the fact that a political *force*, alternative to that of the bourgeoisie, had made its appearance in India's freedom struggle.

However, it is not as if it was smooth sailing for the Party line. Comrades who had to face the ire of the anti-imperialist masses felt the strain, though they could not give coherent expression to it. The mass line of increasing industrial and agricultural production leading to discouragement of militant class struggle, was also received with reservations. These were tolerated only because of the consideration that nothing should be done to weaken the efforts to ensure the USSR's victory in the anti-fascist war. At the end of the war, therefore, the suppressed feelings of comrades came into the open, which started a new phase of inner party struggle.

I would be failing in my duty if I do not refer in this context to the inner-C.C. situation at the time. The General Secretary, Joshi, was the initiator and a dogged defender of the *people's war* line. Ranadive who followed the same line during the years of the war, started shifting towards the end of the war. He, in fact, was the initiator of a new line—the line that culminated in the Party's active involvement in the post-war revolutionary upsurge (the 1946 resolution of the Central Committee). Joshi at this stage tried to soft-pedal the course of militant struggles unleashed by the CC's new militant line. The inner-P.B. crisis arising out of this conflict led to the basic corrections

made at the second Party congress at Calcutta in 1948.

Striking here a personal note, I should record that ever since I joined the Party in 1935-36, I was, like several others such as Sundarayya, inclined towards the Joshi line which I faithfully carried out in my home state of Kerala. Furthermore, unlike in some other states like Andhra and Bengal, the Joshi line was not seriously challenged in Kerala. At the second Party congress (Calcutta, 1948), therefore, the Kerala delegation was (with a few exceptions) solidly with Joshi.

Although there was no challenge to the political line represented by Joshi, the Kerala unit of the Party showed signs of discontent on the organisational plane. Krishna Pillai, the founder leader of the Party and secretary of the state committee unfurled the banner of revolt, "dissolving" the state committee elected at the state conference. That, obviously, was an incorrect step, contrary to all principles of Party organisation. The C.C., however, could not do anything about it, the situation was considered to require careful handling. The "reorganisation" that followed consisted only of the appointment of a number of state level "organisers" (in place of a collectively-functioning state committee) whose work was to be co-ordinated by me as a C.C. member.

This single incident showed the strength as well as the weakness of the state unit in whose formation and development both Krishna Pillai and myself, along with others like A.K. Gopalan, Kanaran etc., had played an effective role. The strong point in us was that, though bourgeois nationalists and radicals to begin with, we had so transformed ourselves into proletarian internationalists that we could "swim against the mainstream" and defend the land of socialism. It was also a point of strength that a comrade like Krishna Pillai could instinctively feel that something was wrong somewhere. Our weakness was that even those (like Pillai) who felt perturbed at the actual situation could not put their finger on the incorrect politics. Let it be noted that the state leadership of the Party was, right upto the second congress, loyally implementing the Joshi line with no reservations on any aspect. This ideological and political weakness, combined with emotional attachment to the land of socialism, demarcated the state unit of the Party (with which I was associated) from several other state units.

CHAPTER 15

PAKISTAN AND NATIONAL UNITY

APART FROM THE GENERAL QUESTION OF *PEOPLE'S War* and the attitude to the Quit India struggle, our isolation from the anti-imperialist masses was strengthened by our stand on the Muslim League's demand for the formation of a separate Muslim majority state (Pakistan). Many thought at the time, and continued to think later on, that, had it not been for this attitude of the CPI, the partition of India could have been avoided. Although an obviously absurd proposition, it shows the depth of feeling in the non-communist sections of the people.

As a matter of fact, the CPI had not come to occupy the decisive role ascribed to it by those who advance this arguement. The Party was, in fact, nowhere in the circle of negotiations on the transfer of power which had, by and large, been confined to the three major forces—the British rulers, the Congress and the Muslim League.

Within the Congress itself, there was a small group led by Rajagopalachari who advocated that the substance of the League's demand for Pakistan should be conceded. The CPI could at best be accused of subscribing to the Rajaji's stand. Yet the pro-Pakistan charge persisted against the CPI, while Rajaji survived his temporary alienation from his colleagues, to become the first Indian Governor-General of the country to take over from Lord Mountbatten, the last Englishman to occupy the post. He became the Home Minister of the Indian Union—a post occupied by Sardar Patel right up to his death—when Dr. Rajendra Prasad became the first President of Republican India.

The difference between the CPI and Rajaji in the eyes of Congress leaders was that, while the former represented an alternate proletarian class force, the latter exhibited an alternate political trend within the same class. The CPI's understanding of the character of the war, its opposition to the Congress call for the Quit India struggle, its campaign for increasing industrial and agricultural production, etc., were based on the proletarian internationalist understanding of the alignment of forces in world politics, namely, that India's own struggle for freedom was inseparably connected with the world-wide struggle against fascism. The Congress leadership (including Rajaji), on the other hand, looked upon India's freedom struggle as a matter of negotiations with the British rulers, on the one hand, and the Muslim League, on the other.

The difference between Rajaji and the rest of the Congress leadership, in other words, was tactical—how best to corner the British rulers in the three-cornered bargaining. That is why he could come out of the test—the period of hard bargaining for the transfer of power—with his bonafides as a national leader unscathed. It was he who, in fact, declared on behalf of the Congress leadership (as Chief Minister of Madras in 1952) that "the communists are my enemy from A to Z".

The stand adopted by the CPI was undoubtedly incorrect and was subsequently rectified. But, as in the case of its characterisation of the war, opposition to the Quit India call, campaign for increasing production, etc., mistakes crept in on the Pakistan question as well. In trying to chart a course of action independent of and opposed to the courageous politics of bargaining for a *peaceful* transfer of power from the British rulers to national leaders, we tended to equate the bourgeois nationalist Congress with the separatist communal Muslim League.

The CPI, in fact, made its own contribution to the body of India's political thinking when it came out against the two contending bourgeois concepts of (i) *India as a single nation* (Congress), and (*ii*) *Hindus and Muslims being two nations* (League). Coming out against both, the CPI developed its own concept of *India as a multinational country whose unity could be preserved only by recognising its diversity.* The Party, in fact, made a serious

proposal that, instead of a single constituent assembly for the country (Congress) or two assemblies for the two (Hindu and Muslim) nations (League) there, should be as many assemblies as there are linguistic-cultural groups or nationalities.

Formulated as this was at a time when the British rulers were making cunning and calculated efforts to destabilise united India with its powerful freedom movement, it appeared to the mass of anti-imperialists that the CPI was extending support to the Muslim League demand for partition. This cannot be considered a totally prejudiced view. For, behind the CPI proposal was the assumption that the League's demand for partition was as legitimate as the Congress opposition to it. The fact was missed that the League was receiving unqualified support from British imperialism, while the Congress was resisting it, though it ultimately succumbed to it.

The essence of the mistake committed by the Party was that, as opposed to the Marxist-Leninist stand that the question of nationalities should be dealt with not abstractly but as part of the class political question, (India's freedom struggle in this case), the CPI failed to take due account of the real class and national situation in the country. Equating the League demand for the division of India with the Congress opposition to it, meant putting on par an avowedly pro-imperialist section of the bourgeoisie with its oppositional, though compromising, rival in the same class—a stand which is clearly impermissible for Marxist-Leninists. The only saving feature was that a beginning towards the correction was made as early as possible (in 1948, at the second congress).

The fact, however, remains that the CPI's struggle with the Congress leadership was a necessary one. For, the Congress leaders who fought for a united India upto the last, had in the end to agree to the partition ; they then put into practice their pet theory of a single, unified and centralised India on the basis of which they started framing a constitution for free India. Little was left of the federal principle to which they had to agree in the days of the freedom struggle. Furthermore, once the constitution was framed, the new rulers made increasing inroads into whatever had been incorporated in the constitution concerninig autonomy of the states. Unitary in content, though

federal in form—this was the direction the new rulers gave to the polity of the country.

This naturally evoked strong protest from the provincial and local groups of the bourgeoisie. Beginning with Tamil Nadu, a series of movements developed, many of them having a separatist thrust. The very first election under the new constitution (1952) saw the emergence of a purely regional grouping in Tamil Nadu. Subsequent developments in other states showed that Tamil Nadu was no exception. The central leadership itself had earlier conceded (while framing the constitution) that Jammu and Kashmir should enjoy a "special status", with its separate Constitution, High Court, Public Service Commission, etc. It is also worth noting that the central leadership which originally opposed the reorganisation of provinces on a linguistic basis had, in the end, to agree to it—first in Andhra, then in a number of states, and in the end Bombay and Punjab. Furthermore, the original provision in the constitution regarding a common official language (Hindi) had to be indefinitely put off. Above all, the demand for reviewing the centre-state relations assumed serious proportions, the government itself having to concede the importance of the issue.

It is obvious now that, while suffering from some serious distortions and deviations with regard to the Marxist-Leninist theory of nationalities—a theory which subordinates every socio-political question, including that of nationalities, to the central question of proletarian leadership over the democratic revolution—the CPI brought to the forefront a burning political issue. The Congress concept of a single nation-state as well as the League demand for two religion-based (Hindu and Muslim) nations had to be combatted in the 1940s. Similarly, the Congress move towards a centralised authoritarian state, on the one hand, and the DMK-sponsored but now widely held view that the centre should have very little authority over the states, had to be combatted. The Party then had, and still has, to contend against these two trends in bourgeois politics.

Striking a personal note, reference may be made to a booklet which I wrote in this period. It built up a case for the formation of a new state of Kerala unifying the contiguous areas of Madras, Cochin and Travancore in which the Malayalam-

speaking people formed the majority of inhabitants. Mine, however, was not the only attempt to concretise the Party's idea of linguistic states organised on a radical democratic programme. Two other members of the Central Committee—Sundarayya of Andhra, and Bhowani Sen of Bengal—wrote pamphlets similar to mine on *Visalandhra* and *Natun* (*new*) *Bengal*. Produced as campaign material for the 1946 election to the state assemblies, they also laid the ideological basis for the post-election wave of mass struggles—Bengal's Tebhaga, Andhra's Telangana, and Kerala's Punnapra-Vayalar, and peasant struggles in the rest of Andhra and Kerala.

Self-critically looking back on my work, I should own that it (the work) was hampered by a wrong understanding on two counts. Firstly, the concept of Aikya (united) Kerala had elements of the "uniqueness of Kerala society", as if it were not part of Indian society. This had some baneful consequences for the subsequent work of the Party for the formation and development of the state of Kerala. Secondly, the caste-communal politics corroding the development of the democratic movement in Kerala—particularly its Cochin and Travancore parts—was underplayed. Just as at the all-India level the Party put on par the Congress and the Muslim League, so did I tend to equate organisations like the State Congress (Travancore) and Praja Mandalam (Cochin) with some caste and communal organisations. The task of exposing and fighting these organisations from the class positions of the proletariat was underplayed, in the booklet.

The wrong understanding on the second question—caste and communal movements—however, was not confined to my writings. At the all-India level as well as in Kerala, the Party decided to send some of its activists into the Muslim League. So did we in Kerala send some of our active cadres into several caste organisations to "radicalise" them. I myself participated in this attempt at "radicalising" the caste and communal organisations. Although these efforts were short-lived, their impact on Kerala politics was not so, since correction made in the practice was not accompanied by a re-education of the Party.

CHAPTER 16

THE FINAL ASSAULT

THE END OF THE ANTI-FASCIST WAR IN 1945 (MAY in Europe, August in Asia) saw a world-wide revolutionary upsurge, as was implied in our slogan of *people's war*. Particularly in Asia did it see the beginning of a gigantic contest in China which culminated in the formation of a People's Democratic State in 1949. Earlier, in 1945, a peole's revolutionary government had emerged in Viet Nam. In countries like Indonesia, Malaya, Philippines, etc., where the imperialists came back after the war, militant armed struggles started; they were all led by the Communist Party. Asia was indeed in ferment and, thanks to the leading role played by the Soviet Union and the war-time guerillas in occupied Asia and Europe (who again were, by and large, led by the communists), the prestige of the communist movement among the non-party people went high.

The situation in India was, however, different. Unlike Viet Nam which had a freedom movement led by the Communist Party, our freedom movement was led by the bourgeois leadership of the Indian National Congress. The very technique of the freedom movement led by the Congress was to use mass militancy to force the British to come to a negotiated settlement. This was true of the "Do or Die" call given in the Quit India resolution as well. Hence the dependence on the spontaneous anger of the masses which, it was expected, would put such pressure on the British to concede the national demand. Hence, also, the otherwise inexplicable phenomenon that Gandhi, the apostle of non-violence, did not insist (for once in his long

political career) on non-violence.

It will be worth recalling that, two decades earlier, the Mahatma had withdrawn his call for mass civil disobedience because his followers at Chauri-Chaura had used violence against the police. Following the Quit India call, however, mass "violence" was several-fold greater than at Chauri-Chaura; however, it was not those who organised this mass violence whom he blamed, but the British who unleashed what he called the "leonine violence". If he and his colleagues had not been arrested, he told the Viceroy in a letter from prison, they would have been able to prevent the violence. Dissociating himself thus from all that was going on outside as a consequence of his "Do or Die" call, he did not denounce them for overstepping the limits of non-violence; it was the British who, according to him, were responsible for creating this situation.

This was the point from where the thread of negotiations was taken up by the British who released Gandhi from jail, started negotiations with him and, along with him, also with the Muslim League's Jinnah. It was not their reluctance to part with power, the British maintained, that was blocking a settlement between themselves and the Congress, but the failure of the latter to come to an agreement with the League. Other problems, including the scheduled castes and their distrust of the Congress, the intransigence of the rulers of princely states, etc., were also sought to be utilised by them. The failure of Mahatma Gandhi, after several rounds of talks with Jinnah, to come to an agreement, was a negative feature of the situation of which the British wanted to make maximum use.

It was against this background that the British announced elections to the legislative assemblies of all the "British Indian" provinces. Since the first election held in 1937, another was due in 1942, but because of the extraordinary conditions created by the war, it had to be put off. Now that the war was over, it was going to be held. It was obvious that the electorate would be approached by both the Congress and its adversaries to mobilise mass support for their respective positions. The divisions that would follow, would be an ideal background against which the British could set one against the other.

This, in fact, was exactly what happened. The Congress leaders

used the election campaign to glorify all that they did to project the national demand, their call to the British to Quit India and the struggle that they launched. The targets of their attack were the British rulers who refused to concede the national demand and drowned the Quit India struggle in blood, as well as the League leaders who were out to divide India. As for the communists, they had "joined hands with the British to break the people's resistance". When the imperialist rulers and the Indian people confronted each other, the communists were "on the other side". However, they did not confine themselves to verbal propaganda against the communists. They organised physical attacks on communist meetings, physical assaults on individual leaders, campaigners and active cadres engaged in the election campaign. Never did the Party have to face such widespread all-India attacks on the very lives of individual communists from non-official agencies.

This was the first time that the communists were contesting elections in name of the Party, as Party candidates with their red colour boxes and committed to the manifesto issued by the Party. Some (including myself) had earlier contested, won and functioned in the state legislatures but, then, we were Congress candidates and became Congress MLAs. Now we were the Party candidates committed to the Party manifesto which was distinct from and opposed to the manifestos of other Parties. We were up against the two giants—the Congress giving expression to the national aspirations of the Indian people, and the Muslim League standing for a religious community demanding the division of India on the basis of the two distinct religious communities into which the bulk of the Indian people were divided.

It is true that, in some parts of the country, we had emerged as a mass Party standing on its own, fighting the two giants with its own programme, and supported by sizeable sections of the people. But, moved as the people at large were by the national aspirations voiced by the Congress and the re io-communal sentiments given expression to by the League we were virtually a drop in the ocean of the electorate. No realistic observer of the political scene could have expected us to make such an impact on the electorate as to have our

candidates elected. It was a political battle, a battle for the independent identity of the communists as a national political force. The results were a vindication of our stand, helping us to attain the immediate objective of asserting our existence as an independent national political party.

Out of the three areas which constitute the present-day Kerala, Malabar alone was then part of a "British Indian" province (Madras). The election, therefore, was confined to this district. Contesting five out of the six general constituences, we lost all but polled between 40 and 7 per cent of the votes polled in them. As for the separate Muslim constituencies (where no non-Muslim was a voter), we contested only one, but lost the security in that constituency. (Any candidate polling less than 6¼ per cent of the total votes polled lost the security.) The significance of the polling here was that, though we contested five general constituences, in none of them did we lose the security, while we polled abut 40 per cent in one of them. I happened to be the one who polled the lowest percentage of votes, making my rival Congress candidate exclaim, "you have won !" His hope that I would lose the deposit was not fulfilled.

In other "strongholds" of the Party, too, the picture was more or less the same. Though in the Andhra districts of Madras Province and West Bengal, as in Malabar, the Party was expected to make a good show, which it did in terms of the percentage of votes polled, none of our candidates in the general constituencies got elected. Only in a few special constituencies for labour (in which only labourers were registered as voters) did Party candidates win. Jyoti Basu in Bengal and Dange in Maharashtra were among the half-a-dozen or so to become the first communist legislators; they were elected from purely labour constituencies.

The sizeable vote polled by the Party in several general constituencies and the half-a-dozen seats won in labour constituencies showed that the Party had started becoming an electoral force, even though it was ranged against two political parties, one of which (the Congress) was backed by the tradition of decades of national struggle and the other (the Muslim League) was swaying the mass of people belonging to a parti-

cular religious community. This was due to the fact that at least a section of the people had begun to appreciate the role played by us in the freedom struggle, even though our role in opposition to the Quit India struggle had alienated a big section. Our sustained ideological, agitational and organisational work in those difficult years helped us in consolidating the mass base that we had built earlier. Polling sizeable votes but failing to win a single seat in the non-labour constituencies, indicated our lag in support among the people, even though we were no more negligible as a potential force.

A word about the main thrust of our appeal to the electorate. There was, on the one hand, a critique of the socio-economic policies pursued by the two major political parties—the Congress and the League. The perspective of a new democratic India adopting radical policies was the essence of the election manifesto. This alternate class objective, however, was to be realised through "the unity of the two major parties" (the Congress and the League). The appeal made to the two bourgeois parties was designed to foil the British game of dividing the Indian people and continuing to dominate the nation. The two parties were thus put on par, and no difference was made between a bourgeois party which was committed (though not completely loyal) to secular democracy and another which was openly committed to religious bigotry. It obviously, could not move the democratic sections rallied behind the two major parties. The socio-economic programme outlined in the Manifesto, however, moved the masses rallied behind the Party—those who had extended their support to the Party even in the worst days of isolation from the anti-imperialist masses, consequent upon the Party's opposition to the Quit India struggle. The political consequence of the campaign was, in other words, consolidation of the Party's mass base.

The upshot of the election was that the Congress won comfortable majorities in the non-Muslim majority provinces, while the League could make a similar show in the Muslim majority provinces (except in the North-Western Frontier Province where the Congress had a marginal victory). The formation of Congress and League governments in the two sets of states made it possible for each to make hard bargains

against each other and in the dialogue with the British. Behind the provincial governments led by the Congress was the credit of several decades of freedom struggle under its leadership culminating in the Quit India struggle; while the League was the leader of a six-year-old campaign for the "Muslim nation's right" to have its own state. While both of them called for direct mass action for the realisation of their goals (freedom for a united India and the formation of a new Islamic India, respectively), they used the loyalty of the masses for a negotiated settlement with the British.

Even before, and particularly during the election, there were signs that though the people were following the bourgeois leaderships of the two major parties, they did not strictly conform to the pattern of negotiated settlement set by the leaders. Before the elections, there was the spontaneous and countrywide mass movement for the release of thousands of the Indian National Army (INA) personnel taken prisoner by the British after the Japanese surrendered. The INA being the inheritor of Netaji Subhash Bose (the organiser and commander-in-chief of the force), it symbolised the very anti-imperialist sentiment which the Congress claimed to represent. As for the League, it had no intention of appearing to lag behind in championing the national cause. There was the additional reason that a sizeable number of the INA personnel were Muslims. The campaign for the release of the INA prisoners thus acquired a real national character cutting across party barriers.

Then came the election which, in a way, was the dress rehearsal of what was to come : a bitter battle between the forces of national unity represented by the Congress and the division for which the League stood. As opposed to the path taken by the leaders of the two parties (negotiated settlement with the British), however, was the path being spontaneously taken by the people coming out on the streets. This was graphically illustrated by what began in Bombay and gradually spread to other states—a revolt by the armed forces (the Royal Indian Navy) and huge and militant working class demonstrations in Bombay led by the Communist Party. While the earlier mass demonstrations in support of the INA personnel were appreciated and approved by the Congress and League leaders, the

RIN revolt and mass demonstrations in support thereof caused concern to both. After all, they (the Congress and League leaders) were themselves expecting to become the rulers of a country each. A revolt in the armed forces was, therefore, unthinkable for them. Being still in the opposition, however, they could not wash their hands of any section of the fighting people.

The embarassment of the Congress and League leaders, however, was nothing when compared to the crisis through which the British rulers were then passing. A part of their empire in Asia had passed into Japanese hands and had to be reoccupied in armed confrontation with guerilla groups formed after the Japanese defeat (Malaya, Burma, etc.). It was only in India that, despite the Quit India struggle which was drowned in blood, the imperial writ could run. If this country turned into an arena of a mutiny by the armed forces, that would be the beginning of the end of the Empire. The British government, therefore, announced the despatch of a Cabinet Mission, directing it to open negotiations with the Indian leaders on the transfer of power. The Mission's visit to India and the following round of negotiations culminated in the formation of an interim government at the centre, with Congress leader Nehru as its chief and the League's Liaquat Ali Khan as Finance Minister.

The intentions of the League leaders became clear when they gave a call for observance of a "liberation day". The formation of a government in which the Congress and the League were equal partners was hailed as a "victory for the Muslim nation", a stepping stone towards Pakistan. Nothing was spared to make the "liberation day" an occasion for a grand rally for Pakistan. True to form, the observance was marked by organised communal riots in major cities, followed by a repetition in other centres of what happened in the major cities.

Together with participation in the central government and active negotiations on the future set-up of the country's administration, this sort of mass mobilisation constituted the "final assault" made by the League leaders. The Congress leaders, for their part, were put on the defensive. Reduced to the position of helpless spectators of a politics of riots unleashed by

their partners in the administration, they could not help pulling along with their ministerial partners, lest they should be put in a weaker position in bargaining with the British, but at the same time, they also realised that partnership with such colleagues in the administration was doing damage to the country's unity. On this question, in fact, there was a serious divergence between Mahatma Gandhi and his "disciples" who, it had become clear, did not care for his advice when it was a question of getting into the seats of power.

CHAPTER 17

UNITED STRUGGLES VERSUS COMMUNAL RIOTS

AUGUST 19, 1946, MARKED THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY of the outbreak of the Malabar rebellion, popularly called the Moplah rebellion. Recalling that outbreak which took place a quarter-century ago, the Kerala Committee of the CPI issued a manifesto under the title "The Call and the Warning". The "call" referred to the current mass upsurge not only in the Malabar part of the then emerging state of Kerala but in the whole country, including the two (Cochin and Travancore) princely states which were yet to be merged in the linguistic state of Kerala in the making. While drawing attention to the need for developing and unifying this mass upsurge—this was the essence of the "call"—the Party gave the "warning" that, as happened in Malabar 25 years earlier, there was a real danger that the militant mass struggles might well be diverted all over the country into a fratricidal war.

The Muslim League's call for and the observance of the "liberation day" unleashed a wave of communal riots all over the country. Nobody who had at heart the unity of the nation and peaceful living by all sections of the Indian people, could afford to be complacent about the impending threat. There was, however, a parallel movement which brought together the common masses belonging to those very communities which were being set against one another by such diversionary calls as the Muslim League's "liberation day".

Two such instances were the countrywide militant demonstrations demanding the release of the INA personnel and the

RIN revolt, referred to earlier. They became the precursors of a many-sided advance of the fighting people—the industrial workers, the middle class employees, the rest of the urban poor, the millions of peasants from the poorest to the relatively better-off sections. The Communist Party which, for the duration of the Soviet-led anti-fascist war, had been constrained in its role of leading mass struggles, rapidly overcame the inhibitions and returned to its traditional role of the unifier and leader of militant struggles.

This, in fact, was the thrust of the election review made, and the new political-tactical line adopted, by the Central Committee in the weeks following the 1946 elections. Reviewing the Cabinet Mission's confabulations which culminated in the Muslim League's call for direct action, the political resolution of the C.C. also underlined the threat of communal riots which loomed on the political horizon. The Kerala committee's "call and warning" manifesto echoed the sentiments voiced in the documents of the Central Committee.

The government's reaction was quick and drastic. The office of the Party paper, *Deshabhimani*, which published the manifesto and the press where it was printed, were raided and heavy security was demanded if the paper was to continue. A.K. Gopalan and myself were arrested and produced before the magistrate who bound us for a year on a personal bond and another surety.

Following it, nearly five months later (January 1947), many of us in the then Congress-ruled Madras, including Malabar, were arrested and detained. I was taken away at a time when I was bed-ridden with chicken-pox and my wife was on the point of having her second delivery : a son was born within hours of my being taken away. All of us were taken to and kept for almost seven months in the very same Vellore Jail where the leader of the newly formed Congress ministry (Prakasam) and many of his ministerial colleagues were my jailmates in 1932. While we were in jail, still more heavy securities were demanded of *Deshabhimani* which were, of course, promptly paid, thanks to the ready response of *Deshabhimani* and the Party supporters who made the utmost financial sacrifices to keep the paper running.

The "crime" of which *Deshabhimani* and the Party were charged was that we stood with the people and led them in struggles. The workers and employees of the South Indian Railway Company were carrying on a prolonged and determined strike—the most effective since the historic 1928 strike. There were also other sections of the organised industrial working class and soon their fighting ranks were joined by two new sections—the municipal workers and government employees. The latter, i.e., white collar employees, were hitherto unorganised and their entry into the arena of the strike movement was indicative of a new stage reached by the militant working class movement in Malabar.

The peasantry, too, was again on the move striking a new path which linked the organised peasantry with the mass of rural and urban poor. The Kisan Sabha took up the grave food situation and embarked on a form of struggle which roused all sections of the suffering people. Drawing the attention of the government to the grave shortage of foodgrains in the villages, it demanded that the landlords who had surplus foodgrains, should not be allowed to take it out of the concerned village; these surplus grain holdings of the landlords should be seized and distributed at moderate prices in those very villages. Another demand made was that in order to meet the scarcity of foodgrains, peasants should be allowed to cultivate uncultivated and fallow lands. These and similar demands oriented to the conditions of food scarcity, became the basis on which militant mass actions were organised, leading to clashes with the police.

The type of working class and peasant actions in Malabar naturally brought the Party into conflict with the newly-formed Congress government of Madras. Congressmen did tell their followers that the Communists who had opposed the Congress-led Quit India struggle, were now opposing the Congress government at the provincial level, and the same opposition they would extend to the central government when power would have been transferred at the centre.

With some variations, this was true of Cochin as well. For, the 'liberal' Maharaja of that state went a step further from the one he had taken earlier: beginning with the one-member

ministry to which only a couple of inconsequential departments had been handed over in 1938, most of the departments were now transferred to a larger ministry. This was accompanied by the proclamation that full responsible government would before long be established in the state. Above all, the Maharaja stated in no uncertain terms that he stood for the formation of a united Kerala into which Cochin would be merged. Here too, therefore, the broad nationalist public opinion had no sympathies for the class and mass struggles to which leadership was being given by the CPI.

In Travancore, however, the situation was totally different. The government there was not only resisting the demand for responsible government (which was conceded in neighbouring Cochin) but threatening to keep Travancore out of the emerging free India, making it an "independent state of Travancore". As for the political-administrative system, it was said that a government responsible to elected representatives of the people was not suited to the conditions there ; it was, therefore, proposed that "democracy of the American type" would be adopted for the state. This stand of the Travancore administration provoked the entire people not only in the state but throughout the country. Barring a handful who from the very beginning had stood with the despotic administration in opposition to the demand for responsible government, all politically active people—regardless of caste, community, ideology and politics—came out in opposition to the government's stand.

It is a matter of pride for the Communist Party that it rose to the occasion and organised the militant working class of Alleppey and Chertala as the vanguard of the people's struggle against "Independent Travancore" and "American Model". Krishna Pillai, the moving spirit behind the historic 1938 strike in Alleppey, was the source of inspiration for the thousands of militants who were braving the hired agents of the local gentry, actively assisted by the police and other official agencies. Backed as the opponents were by the organised military force of the state, the virtually unarmed militants were, of course, finished off after a few days' encounter. Hundreds fell dead at Punnapra and Vayalar, thousands were maimed for life, a large number of women and children turned into widows

and orphans—such was the price paid by the militant working class of Travancore.

During the months immediately following the martyrdom of hundreds in Punnapra and Vayalar, the two taluks of Alleppey and Chertala looked like a veritable graveyard. That, however, was only a temporary phenomenon. Things moved fast. Revulsion against the butchery perpetrated by the regime gripped the people forcing the head of the regime to flee the state under humiliating circumstances. Followed the official proclamation that both the "Independent Travancore" and "American model" projects were withdrawn. A *new ad hoc* administration under an "Adviser to the Maharaja" opened negotiations with the state Congress leaders, paving the way for the first election in the state with adult suffrage and the subsequent formation of a government responsible to the legislature.

One slogan which rent the air during the February 1948 elections is worth mentioning: "Vayalar blood is our blood". Coming as it did from hundreds of thousands of throats, it showed that the martyrdom of hundreds and the sufferings of thousands more as a result of that historic confrontation with the despotic regime had become, like many others in the history of our freedom struggle and of the militant working class movement, a legend which inspired generations. Just a decade after that slogan reverberated throughout Travancore, the first Communist government of Kerala took its solemn oath before the Vayalar martyrs' grave before being sworn in by the Governor in Trivandrum.

Comparable, in one respect, were the struggles of Punnapra-Vayalar in Travancore and of Telangana in Andhra. Both were directed against the autocratic princely rule and led by the CPI. The autocratic rulers of both the states were going not only against their own subjects but also against the mainstream of the national movement. The party of the working class which stood at the head of the struggles was thus fighting "the enemy of its enemy", paving the way for the establishment of a bourgeois political system. Furthermore, the two struggles ultimately led to the formation of ethnically-homogenous linguistic states, of Aikya Kerala and Vishalandhra respectively.

Here, however, the similarities end and differences begin. Although based on the rural poor in the surrounding areas and therefore, directed against the rural bullies, the Travancore movement was led by the organised working class in Alleppey. Although connected with a backward rather than an advanced technique of production, the coir workers and their class brothers had mastered the typically working class weapons of trade unionism and the strike. It had struck deep roots among the rural poor. A core of the educated, trained cadre that it threw up from its own ranks, could therefore rally the militant rural poor bringing them under the leadership of the organised vanguard of the proletariat, the Communist Party. The militant mass movement that came to be built on this basis, however, could not develop that consistent organisation and those effective methods of resistance as were developed in Telangana. The entire movement did not last for more than a few weeks.

As for Telangana, it began a few weeks before the crucial battles of Punnapra and Vayalar were fought. It continued for full two years till the surrender of the Nizam to the advancing Indian Army. In this relatively long period, the militant kisans of the Telugu-speaking areas of the state had chased away the big landlords (the Taluqdars and Deshmukhs), distributing their land and other properties among the rural poor. With this remarkable achievement to their credit, the kisans, led by the Andhra Mahasabha and the Communist Party had established in 3,000 villages the power of the rural poor which became the basis on which resistance could be offered even to the Indian army for nearly two years after the Nizam's surrender.

The other "British Indian" province which showed a remarkable unity, militancy and organisational skill of the rural poor was Bengal where a state-wide kisan upsurge united the Hindu, the Muslim, the Harijan and the Adivasi in a solid alliance in struggle for the realisation of what was called Tebhaga—one-third of the crop as rent to the landlord. There being two princely rulers, and with complete ethnic-linguistic unity among the people of Bengal, this was a purely agrarian movement calculated to realise the demand of the rural poor as such.

It was, however, soon disrupted. The very millions who had earlier stood shoulder to shoulder with one another in struggle for Tebhaga soon came to be divided between the protagonists of a united India and two Indias respectively. Culminating in the state-political division of an ethnically-homogeneous people (the Bengalis) into two hostile political divisions, and the migration of millions to and from the two now separated territories. Bengal witnessed the very opposite of Andhra and Kerala : while the latter two were subsequently brought together into homogenous, ethnically and culturally unified states, the ethnically-culturally homogeneous people of Bengal came to be artificially cut up into two.

The same fate befell the people of Punjab. The gallant men and women of that state—Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs of that historically, ethnically-culturally homogeneous region—showed remarkable examples of self-sacrifice and martyrdom for the cause of Indian freedom, democracy for the people who were groaning under the despotic princely states, and the realisation of the workers' and kisans' demands. The soil on which the seeds of communism sprouted in the earlier years, however, gave birth to the storm centres of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communalism. Punjab suffered as much as, if not more than, Bengal from the poison which culminated in the division of a homogenously united people into two hostile camps and led to unspeakably inhuman deeds on the part of those who were poisoned by the venom of communalism.

The disease, of course, was not confined to Punjab and Bengal. The Sindhis and some other people also shared the same fate. Unlike Bengal and Punjab, however, they were areas in which the radical political forces, together with the worker-peasant movements, were relatively weak. Therefore, they did not have that detrimental effect on the revolutionary movement in the country as the communal division of Bengal and Punjab had. The total impact on the country of all that happened in all areas was that for those who welcomed the British quitting India when it took place on these terms, the dawn of freedom left a bitter taste in the mouth.

Before concluding this chapter, it is necessary to mention that despite the tragedy which overtook the country in the last

years of freedom struggle, the organised peasantry with their class brothers, the agricultural proletariat, had come into their own. While Bengal's Tebhaga, Andhra's Telangana and Kerala's Punnapra-Vayalar had directly brought the rural poor into the arena of the last battle for democracy, areas such as Malabar, the Andhra districts of Madras, Tanjore in Tamil Nadu, the Warli area in Maharashtra, the tribals in Tripura, etc., became the valiant participants in militant struggles, though of local proportions. It is a matter of credit for the CPI that it gave concrete guidance and leadership to every one of these movements.

CHAPTER 18

THE TELANGANA WAY

ALTHOUGH THE PARTY AS A WHOLE WAS IN THE thick of the militant struggles described in the previous chapter, the leadership was by no means unified : a section led by the General Secretary, P.C. Joshi, wanted to go slow, saying that the Party's militancy was inviting repression. This, however, did not have much impact on the course of the struggles because, after years of restraint (during the *people's war* period) comrades felt it possible to adopt a fighting stance which was shared by the large mass of sympathisers and supporters.

The developing communal riots, of course, posed several questions, and put serious roadblocks in the development of struggles. The bulk of Party members and supporters, however, stood the test, and fought heroically against those who tried to inject the poison of communal hatred and violence among the fighting people. While this demarcated the communists from other parties, the Party could not stop the avalanche of the riots which caused intense agony to all sensitive people.

Coming as the Mountbatten Plan for the transfer of power did against this background, the Party leadership could not come to an unanimous assessment of the British Plan. One view was that the Party should give qualified welcome to the Plan, characterising it as a weapon in the hands of the people for further advance. Opposed to it was the view that the Plan was a cunning manoeuvre of the British to retain India as their colony in fact, while formally transferring power. Clashing against each other for six months, the latter view prevailed and formed the basis of the Second Party Congress held at Calcutta

in February-March 1948. Under the views that prevailed in the Central Committee, were presented two documents to the Congress for adoption : a positive "thesis" assessing the international and national situation and outlining the tasks flowing from the assessment, and a self-critical review which sharply nailed down the ideological, political and organisational mistakes committed by the leadership since the days of *people's war*. Both documents were duly approved by the Congress. Though many had reservations, there was no open expression of dissent.

The essence of the change in the political-tactical line could be seen in the slogan that reverberated through Calcutta and was picked up by the whole country after the Party Congress : "Telangana way is our way". The effort of the Party would, in other words, be not only to learn from, but repeat Telangana all over the country, establish everywhere the Telangana-model organs of state power through which the Nehru government would be overthrown. The Congress delegates were naturally impressed by the presence of and speeches made by the fraternal delegations from Yugoslavia and Burma—the former having written a glorious chapter in the history of revolutions by organising the guerilla resistance to the Nazi occupation of that country, while the latter were still engaged in armed struggle against British occupation. This was indeed a total reversal of the line pursued by the Party leadership for half a decade.

The ideological-political thrust of the slogan had its impact on the new organisational set-up. General Secretary Joshi who was the king-pin in the politics and organisation of the pre-Congress line, was removed from the C.C. Though his name had been included in the panel proposed by the outgoing C.C., it was opposed on the floor by some C.C. members themselves; there was also intensive lobbying among the delegates, and in the final voting he was defeated. Similar considerations also weighed with the new leadership in the selection of names for the new Polit Bureau—a position which was unexceptionable, since the principles of organisation for Marxist-Leninst parties demand that, while a wider body (C.C. in this case) should have different trends represented on it, the corresponding smaller body (P.B. in this case) should be more compact and homogeneous.

A point of criticism was that the deliberate exclusion of Joshi from the C.C.—particularly the opposition to his name voiced by members of the C.C. which had originally included his name in the panel, followed by the planned canvassing among the delegates—was a violation of the above-mentioned principle.

The delegates went back to their states with mixed feelings, though the overwhelming sentiment was one of relief that a break had been made with the earlier policy. The "Telangana way" slogan captured the imagination of comrades who were determined to do their best to put the slogan into practice. Many were, however, unhappy at the exclusion of Joshi from the C.C. . Was it an indication of the treatment to be meted out to those who had loyally carried out the Party line when Joshi was heading the Party ? Nor would it be correct to say that the militant line advanced at the Congress—summed up in the "Telangana way" slogan—had sunk into the heads and hearts of everybody, though all felt committed to the slogan.

This was the background against which serious differences arose between the new Polit Bureau and the Andhra state leadership which, as is known, was organising and leading the Telangana struggle. The Polit Bureau interpreted the Calcutta Congress line as nothing but preparing the country for a revolutionary uprising of the Russian type. The Andhra leadership countered it, saying that the Telangana way meant something different, more or less similar to what developed in China; they maintained that the Telangana experience itself showed that the Chinese path was more suited to the Indian conditions. The Andhra point of view was, in the end, overruled by the central leadership.

Having disposed of the controversy with the Andhra committee, the P.B. proceeded to carry out its line with determination. A planned inner-party campaign was launched to educate comrades on the incorrectness of the line advocated by the Andhra comrades. Preparations were made to so organise the railway workers to go on a strike and to lead it on militant lines, making it the starting point of a country-wide working class upsurge. This, as was subsequently proved, was a complete overestimation of the popular mood, and the strike project ended in fiasco. However, far from self-critically

analysing the reasons, the P.B. denounced the comrades for not having worked for the success of the strike. In a number of states, the leadership was reorganised and disciplinary measures adopted against a large number of comrades.

The fiasco of the planned strike and the large number of cases of disciplinary actions created an explosive situation in the Party. Many felt uneasy, though the middle ranks did their utmost to carry out the directives given by the P.B. Then came the well-known editorial in the organ of the Communist Information Bureau which advised our Party to go for a change in the line. After an initial resistance, the P.B. organised a full meeting of the Central Committee. For full two months (March end to May end), nearly 30 comrades discussed among themselves—first, informally in groups and, then, formally. Since the whole exercise had to be done when the Party had to work underground and since any slip might cause immense damage to the Party, the organisation of the meeting and its conclusion was a matter of credit for the organisers.

The elaborae discussions, in the end, culminated in the repudiation of the line followed by the Polit Bureau and the adoption of the Andhra line. This was accompanied by a sharp critique of the organisational measures adopted by the P.B. Those who were responsible for the political organisational line of the Calcutta Congress were not only removed from the leadership but suspended from the Party, with a commission appointed to investigate into the violations of Party norms by the comrades. The entire Central Committee was reconstituted and reduced in size, with a majority of those who had stood by the Andhra line. From among such a reconstituted C.C. (12 or 13 members), a P.B. of three was elected, with C. Rajeswara Rao as General Secretary and M. Basavapunnaiah as one of the P.B. members.

It took some time for the new leadership to take its line to the entire Party. Why could it not receive the same response as the earlier (Calcutta Congress) line did? Those who had followed the pre-Calcutta Congress line said that this was a new version of the sectarian line adopted at the Calcutta Congress. The criticism from the other end was that the new line amounted to the abandonment of the proletarian line. The former were

more vociferous and mounted a frontal attack on the new line and its proponents. Three leading members of the Party—Dange, Ghate and Ajoy Ghosh—prepared a note and had it circulated in the Party. This and other documents opposing the Polit Bureau line, received extensive circulation, the open Party headquarters in Bombay itself becoming the hub of these activities. The term "inner-party struggle" and its abbreviation, IPS, became common in Party circles.

This made it necessary for the new P.B. to convene a meeting of leading comrades, including the three who had prepared and circulated their critique of the P.B. and its line. After protracted discussions it was agreed (1) that the entire controversy over the path of the Indian revolution—the Russian and the Chinese—should be resolved for which the assistance of the CPSU should be sought; and (2) that the P.B. and C.C. should be reconstituted and Party unity restored.

With this end in view, the General Secretary was removed from the post, and a new P.B. formed, with Ajoy Ghosh discharging the functions of the General Secretary. A four-member delegation of the Party, with two each representing the two contending trends, was selected to go to the Soviet Union (of course, clandestinely) and have discussions with the CPSU. Dange and Ajoy Ghosh representing one trend, and Rajeswara Rao and Basavapunnaiah the other, were the comrades selected to go abroad. I was asked to look after the Party centre till they came back.

It will be appropriate here to explain briefly where I stood in the entire process of the inner-party struggle. I had faithfully followed the Joshi line. So did the leading comrades in Kerala. I was wholeheartedly for the 1946 change in the Party line—a line which, in Kerala, culminated in the Punnapra-Vayalar and other struggles. Unlike many other comrades like Krishna Pillai, I was not giving the practical on-the-spot guidance to any of these struggles. But my role in organising the agitational and propaganda support to the comrades and in collectively working out the line was not negligible. Hence, the leading position I occupied in the Party in Kerala and as representative of Kerala in the C.C.

To the Calcutta Congress I went along with the rest of the

comrades and welcomed the change. I was not sure whether, with my earlier background, I would be able to do full justice to the implementation of the new line. This was my position also when the Calcutta Congress line was replaced by the Andhra line. I was, therefore, not surprised when I was not included in either the Ranadive or the Rajeswara Rao P.B. Furthermore, unlike many other states, Kerala did not have any comrade who could be said to have consistently fought any of the three lines which dominated the Party under Joshi, Ranadive and Rajeswara Rao. I, therefore, continued to be in the C.C. since I was originally selected in 1941.

Now that all the three earlier lines were being rejected—the first as revisionist and right-opportunist, and the other two as dogmatic-sectarian—and an effort was made to have a total review of the line, I was for the first time elected a P.B. member and, furthermore, put in charge of the party centre for the duration the four-member Party delegation would be abroad. I was grateful to the comrades for having reposed such trust in me that, though unable to go along fully with the two trends contending against each other, I would so manage the affairs of the Party centre as to facilitate the unification of the Party on the basis of the line that would finally emerge.

In the nearly four months of my waiting for the delegation comrades to come back from Moscow, I had very little work to do, as the centre I was supposed to be "looking after" was only a nominal one. I, therefore, used this period for reviewing my own past, or rather the past of the Kerala movement to whose development I had made some humble contribution. I was encouraged in this endeavour by a Chinese comrade, Liu Nina Yi, who was on a visit to India and with whom I had a clandestine meeting—the first direct contact I was having with a foreign comrade. Learning from me the inner-party position and the controversies raging in the Party, he told me that there was nothing like a concrete study of the concrete problems in our country, without which no inner-party problem could be solved.

I, therefore, undertook the study of the problems and movements in my home state of Kerala, or rather carried forward the little study I had made earlier. The result was (a) a revised

and enlarged version of my earlier booklet *A Short History of the Peasant Movement in Kerala* under the title *Peasant Question in Kerala*, and (b) an English version (radically revised) of my earlier-published history of Kerala in Malayalam, under the title *National Question in Kerala*. Both required subsequent revisions and corrections, not so much on the facts presented as on the political problems dealt with in them. The revisions were made from time to time and helped me to advance from my 1940 minute of dissent to the Malabar Tenancy Committee, followed by the 1945 booklet on Kerala. Like the latter two works, the present two works were essentially based on the experience of the movement and the acute controversies in the Party. All of them, however, had the merit of attempting to relate the problems of the movement to the theoretical-political approach of the Party.

While I was in the midst of this work, the Party delegation returned from Moscow after having detailed discussions with a CPSU delegation headed by Stalin. The conclusions that emerged out of the discussions between the two delegations were incorporated in two draft documents—a Party programme and a Perspective Tactical Line. The programme had, in fact, reached India and was legally published even before the delegation's arrival. The two documents were reported on to the entire Party after which a special conference was clandestinely held in October 1951 for approval of the documents. After approving the two documents, the conference elected a new Central Committee which elected a P.B. with Ajoy Ghosh as the General Secretary.

The upshot of the Moscow discussions was that (1) The poser of the "Russian" or the "Chinese" path was wrong ; India should develop its own path, combining some features of the one and some of the other. (2) Since Telangana struggle had arisen in the last phase of the political struggle against the British, with the feudal ruler of a princely state as the direct target of the people's offensive, the methods used in that struggle could not be used against the new bourgeois rulers whom the majority of the people saw as national leaders ; the Second Congress slogan of "Telangana way our way" was, in other words, incorrect, based on an over estimation of the situation. (3) The

immediate tasks to be undertaken would have to be less spectacular—leading the masses in their day-to-day struggles ; participating in the forthcoming general elections and all other elections, using them for the widest possible popularisation of the Party's programme ; developing a powerful peace movement ; forging the unity of the working class and all other sections of the working people ; resorting the unity of the Party and developing it as a mass revolutionary party of the working class, absorbing into it the best, most militant elements from all sections of the working people, above all the working class.

The line was, in short, a negation of the pre-Second Congress line of right-opportunism as well as the two variants of the post-Second Congress sectarianism. Though not an effective participant in the process of elaborating the new line, I had the satisfaction that I played a humble role in the process. This was recognised by the 1951 Conference which re-elected me to the P.B.

CHAPTER 19

THE BALANCE-SHEET OF INNER-PARTY STRUGGLE

THE OCTOBER 1951 (SPECIAL) CONFERENCE WAS the culmination of a prolonged inner-party struggle beginning with the inner-C.C. controversies that opened in 1946 and temporarily resolved at the second (Calcutta, 1948) Congress which replaced the leadership, along with the line followed so far. The resolution of the controversy at the Calcutta Congress, however, proved to be the beginning of new and still more bitter controversies which led to the complete disruption of the organisation. It was to meet this political-organisational disintegration of the Party that discussions were held between the delegations of the Indian and Soviet Parties. The approval of the two documents by the special Conference in October 1951, therefore, gave relief to the entire Party and the mass of its supporters.

It will be, however, well to recall the opening remarks made and the parting advice given by the leader of the Soviet delegation, Stalin, to the Indian comrades. In his preliminary remarks, he said that since the Soviet comrades had very little knowledge of the Indian conditions, they were not competent to sit in judgement on the controversies raging among Indian communists; they could only throw some light on the Indian problems in the light of the general theory of Marxism-Leninism. The Soviet comrades thus put the main responsibility of drawing up the programme and elucidating the problems of tactics on the Indian delegation, assisting and offering advice

in the process of finalising what the Indian delegation was formulating.

Once this job was done, in which the Soviet delegation played its part, the CPSU delegation leader told our comrades: "Now that you have agreed on the problems under discussion, you go back and implement the line along with your comrades. You the members of the delegation (meaning those who represented the two trends) remain united, unify the Central Committee and then the entire Party on the basis of the agreed line."

This, obviously, was a complete break with the previously-held notions of the Indian comrades. Proletarian internationalism did not now mean the same thing as it was in the days when the Communist International was alive: unlike in those days, there was now no more a centre to direct the world communist movement. The party in every country should, on its own, work out its line, basing itself on the theory of Marxism-Leninism. It might seek and secure the fraternal advice of the more experienced fraternal parties (as our Party did from the CPSU). Such advice from fraternal parties, however, would have its limitations and should not be blindly accepted. The party receiving the advice should independently apply its mind, adding to, deleting from, and amending whatever comes from a fraternal party.

Was it in this spirit that the documents evolved at Moscow were approved by the 1951 special Conference? We who were participants in the entire exercise cannot claim that it was so. Some sort of a sense of sanctity for "the Moscow documents" had influenced the Conference in approving them. It was, however, a fact that the comrades who came back from Moscow had been mentally prepared to have a critical eye on all subsequent developments; they refused to dogmatically stick to the formulations contained in the two documents. As a matter of fact, Stalin's active participation in the formation of the Party programme did not stand in the way of our Party unanimously declaring, within a few years, that many ideas contained in the programme were incorrect, making it necessary to keep the entire document in abeyance. The preparedness to do our own thinking, stand on our own feet which our Party

acquired after the Moscow discussions, was the major gain made in the course of our inner-party struggle.

Anticipating a little, one has to go on record that the earlier notion of there being a guiding centre whose directions our Party should uncritically accept, continued in different forms. Anybody who is critical of one or another proposition advanced by the Soviet party was considered by some to be "anti-internationalist". Subsequently, when the Soviet and Chinese parties came to adopt contradictory positions, some comrades replaced the Chinese for the Soviet party, treating any criticism of that party as "anti-internationalist". The great merit of the 1951 advice of the Soviet party (that our Party should independently add to, delete from, amend or even reject the Moscow documents) was that it gave us courage and confidence to have our independent views on whatever comes from the Soviet, Chinese or other fraternal parties. The emergence of a core of leadership which subsequently risked being denounced as "anti-internationalist" by the supporters of the Soviet or the Chinese party and which did not give up its basic loyality to the two great socialist countries and their leading communist parties, was another gain made in the course of inner-party struggle.

This, however, was the end-result of a prolonged and bitter struggle internationally as well as within our own Party. The emergence in 1946 of a revisionist trend in the international movement which prompted the formation of the Communist Information Bureau (1947); the expulsion in 1948 of the Yugoslav party from the Bureau, followed by open polemics between the Yugoslav party and the rest of the international movement; the subsequent restoration of relations with the Yugoslav party while the struggle against its revisionist line continued; the new line evolved at the 20th Congress of the CPSU which was considered revisionist by a large number of communists all over the world; serious differences which developed since then and ultimately led to the split in the international movement; the repetition of what happened to Soviet-Yugoslav relations earlier in case of Soviet-China relations—these provided the international background against which the three trends in our Party, which fought against one another

from 1946 to 1951, appeared in new forms.

In fact, every time some new development took place internationally or nationally, comrades holding different positions earlier made their own assessments which came into conflict with one another. That was why, though the Party unanimously agreed by the mid-1950s that the Programme of 1951 should be basically revised, sharp differences arose on how and on what lines the revision should be made. That, as will be shown subsequently, was the beginning of a deep inner-party crisis which in the end led to the 1964 split in the Party and a further split in the CPI(M)—formation of a number of Naxalite groups—followed by formation of the Dange group out of the CPI.

One reason for these developments beginning in the latter half of the 1950s, was that the CPSU advice regarding Party unity was not acted upon. Instead of the four delegation members remaining united and proceeding to unify the Central Committee and then the entire Party, they themselves began to fight one another. These, however, were developments which take place later. For the present, there was complete unity of understanding and action. The Programme and Statement of Policy had resolved all existing differences, drawing attention to the immediate issues. Having withdrawn most of the disciplinary actions taken since 1948 and set up an open office of the Central Committee of the Party, all of us plunged overselves into the work of preparing for the first general elections under the 1950 constitution.

The election manifesto of the Party (1951-52) spelt out in simple and popular language the ideals contained in the Party Programme—People's Democracy as opposed to bourgeois democracy. What this meant to the people at large and to every class and stratum separately was clearly explained. No other Party—either bourgeois opposition parties or "the most powerful" left party in the country, the Socialist Party led by Jayaprakash Narayan—had such a perspective and programme as the CPI had, though the Socialist Party claimed that it would emerge out of the elections as the major national opposition at the centre and the ruling party in some states. But when the results came, the CPI emerged as the major opposition at the

centre. In four states, including Madras and Travancore-Cochin with which I was personally connected, united fronts including the CPI, in fact, came very close to forming the government.

With this came to an end my second term of underground life. This was different from the earlier one in three major respects: (1) it was of longer duration (four years as opposed to 27 months); (2) it was spent partly in the Travancore-Cochin area and partly in Calcutta, while the earlier one was all in Malabar (mostly in the northern part of the district); and (3) while in the earlier term, I had to live completely away from my wife, this time we could meet a few times; in fact, for a couple of weeks, she and our kid son came and stayed with me in my underground shelter in Calcutta.

I was still underground when the election was announced. The Party chose me as one of the candidates contesting from Calicut. I, however, could not personally present my papers as I was bound to be arrested in case I did. Somebody else had to do it. My wife came forward to present it on my behalf. Since this was quite in order, it was accepted by the returning officer. My rival, however, raised objection to the acceptance of the paper, saying "we do not know whether he is alive". The objection was over-ruled, my candidature being officially accepted.

In the election, however, I was defeated, though the combination of parties in which the CPI was the leading force, swept the polls. Out of the 30 seats in the Malabar area for the Madras Assembly, the Congress could win only four. Never before had the Congress suffered such an ignominious defeat; its only satisfaction was that the "top man" of the CPI (myself) was defeated.

The alignment of forces in the electoral battle was interesting. Ranged against the Congress were, on the one hand, the alliance of the CPI and a newly-emerging group of Congressmen led by the well-known Gandhian leader Kelappan who, along with J B. Kripalani at the all-India level, broke with the Congress, and joined the opposition in defeating the Congress. Two other opposition groups—the Muslim League and the Socialists—were also in the field. All the three of them had

the common theme of defeating the Congress, particularly some of its top leaders, including its minister from Malabar. This general campaign run by all of them separately generated the political environment but in several constituencies they fought one another. While this did not help the Congress elsewhere, it did in my constituency. As the opposition vote was divided between the Muslim League candidate and me, the Congress could have a slight edge over me.

A word about Kelappan and his group which worked with us to defeat the Congress. Within a few months of the election, many of their leaders, including Kelappan himself, went back to the Congress. At lower levels, however, many of their members refused to fall in line. The electoral battle was, for them, a beginning of transition from Gandhism and anti-communism to left politics, many of them actually joining the Communist Party in later years.

At the national level, it should be noted, the Party's performance was the best in those states and regions where, despite sectarian mistakes, the Party had led militant struggles. Telangana and the rest of Andhra, Travancore-Cochin and Malabar, West Bengal and Tripura—these were the states and regions where the Party had led militant struggles and now succeeded in coming to agreements with left and other like-minded parties. It was thus a vindication of the line evolved at the Party Conference of October 1951 which, in fact, was held a few weeks before the elections.

CHAPTER 20

PARLIAMENTARY FORUM

THE FIRST MEETING OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE held after the elections expressed satisfaction at the results which placed the Party in the position of the major opposition group in the parliament. How to take maximum benefit out of this, consolidate the independent position of the Party and strengthen the bonds with allies—this was the question posed before the Central Committee.

In the two southernmost states of the country—Madras and Travancore-Cochin—there emerged a possibility of alternate governments being formed by left-oriented parties. The non-Congress government, if formed in Travancore-Cochin, in fact, would have been led by the leader of the CPI. Even when this possibility was removed in a few days by the Congress manoeuvres in both the states—a few allies of the Left were persuaded to join the Congress in fighting the left—the correlation of forces in and outside the legislature required constant attention to the work of the Party in the south. The C.C., therefore, decided to shift its headquarters from Bombay to Madras.

Within a few months, however, it was realised that, however important the work in the south was, the centre of the country's political life was Delhi. Apart from our Party being the major opposition group in parliament, all other left and friendly opposition parties had their headquarters (or at least the main centre of activites) in Delhi. Delhi was also the centre where not only national but international issues came to the forefront in day-to-day discussions, debates and polemics. The Party had to be in touch with and intervene in these developments if

it was to discharge its responsibilities as a major opposition group to which the people elected it. The C.C. headquarters was, therefore, once again shifted from Madras to Delhi.

My getting defeated in the elections to the Madras Legislative Assembly made me available for work at the Party centre. I, therefore, shifted myself, along with my wife and son, first to Madras and then to Delhi, leaving our eldest child (daughter) to study in Kerala and Madras. Our younger daughter and son were born in Delhi where I had to stay from 1953-end to 1956-end. I had then to shift myself to Kerala during the election campaign and, on our Party winning a majority in the state legislature, lead the first government of the newly-formed state of Kerala.

The years of my work in Delhi, however, witnessed big developments in Travancore-Cochin with which I was intimately connected. The Congress government formed after the election was by no means stable : the tensions between the Tamil-speaking people of the southern areas and the people of the rest of the state, together with the personal and caste groupings in the Congress party itself, reduced the Congress to a minority in the legislature. Within two years of the formation of the first Congress government in 1952, therefore, a mid-term election had to be held in which a united front of left parties—with the CPI, the RSP, and the Socialist Party as constituents—won a majority. The socialist leader, however, was persuaded by the Congress to form his own "single-party" government with Congress support. The "unique experiment" of a minority "socialist" government supported by the Congress, which was the "constitutional opposition" in the Assembly, however, came to an end when, a year later, the Congress succeeded in pulling the "socialist" single-party government down, followed by formation of the single-party Congress government. The fall of the latter a year later was the precursor of the reorganisation of states to form the present state of Kerala.

While working at the Delhi centre, I often had to go to Travancore-Cochin for helping the comrades there in dealing with these problems and fighting the mid-term elections. This was necessary particularly because, in the wake of certain international developments (the trial and execution of Beria in

the USSR), a barrage of anti-communist attacks was going on and the political and spiritual leadership of the Congress and the Catholic church joined their forces to form what was called the "anti-communist front". My electoral campaign was, therefore, consisted of holding of a series of closed-door hall meetinges where the questions raised by the anti-communist front were answered. While other comrades addressed public meeting, I confined myself to this form of ideological-cum-agitational work.

Unlike in Travancore-Cochin with whose political developments I was then personally associated, things were moving fast in Madras as well. Almost parallel to the above-described developments in Travancore-Cochin, the composite state of Madras witnessed the hotting up of tension in the Andhra districts in favour of formation of a Telugu-speaking Andhra state. An old Gandhiite, Potti Sri Ramulu, went on an indefinite hunger strike to get the Andhra state formed. The refusal of the government to concede the demand culminated in Sri Ramulu's death which forced the government to club the Telugu-speaking districts of Madras into a new Andhra state. The government was also forced to appoint a States Reorganisation Commission to consider the question of forming linguistic states out of the Part A, Part B and Part C states. It was on the recommendation of this Commission that the newly-formed Andhra state (Telugu-speaking districts of Madras) was merged into the state of Hyderabad from which, however, the Marathi and Kannada-speaking areas were taken out and merged with the composite (Maharashtra-Gujarat) Bombay state and the newly-formed state of Karnataka, respectively.

This reorganisation of states did not leave unaffected the states of Travancore-Cochin and Madras. Merging as it did the Tamil-speaking areas of the former into Madras to form the linguistic state of Tamil Nadu and the Malayalam-speaking areas of Madras into Travancore-Cochin to form the new Kerala state, the implementation of the recommendation of the States Reorganisation Commission meant that, in the southern part of the country, the former "British Indian" province of Madras and the "Indian States" of Travancore-Cochin, Mysore and Hyderabad were transformed into four linguistic states (the Part

C state of Coorg was merged with Karnataka). The only shortcoming of the arrangement was that the borders of the newly-formed states were not drawn on the correct democratic basis of contiguous areas with village as the unit and inhabited by people speaking a particular language going to the respective linguistic states. This led to tensions and conflicts in subsequent years.

In the course of the campaign for the formation of Kerala and other linguistic states I had to defend the above principle and debunk the arguments of those (including Congress leaders) who fought for the unprincipled demarcation of state borders. This had an interesting sequel. I had, in my speeches, articles and other publicity material, pleaded for the strict observance of the above principle everywhere, including the northern and southern borders of the newly-formed state of Kerala. The principle, however, was rejected by the Commission in the case of the Kasergode taluk in the north.

Later on, when I became Chief Minister of Kerala and the Congressmen in Karnataka started agitating for "Kasergode in Karnataka", the then Union Home Minister Pant asked me (orally as well as in writing) to agree to transfer Kasergode to Karnataka in terms of what I myself had agreed to earlier. I replied that I was prepared to agree if he be prepared to apply everywhere the principle on the basis of which I had written and spoken about Kasergode. He declined to do it ; he was obviously making partisan use of what I had earlier written to favour his partymen who were running the Karnataka government.

The Party centre had been shifted to Delhi because the major activities of the Party had to be coordinated with the work of our members of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. The Central Committee had nominated as the leader of Party groups in the two houses A.K. Gopalan and P. Sundarayya, respectively. Both of them had already distinguished themselves as mass and Party leaders but were for the first time entering parliament.

Sundarayya remained in the Rajya Sabha only for a short duration—three years to be exact. He had to leave parliament in early 1955 when the first election to the newly-formed Andhra (before the Telangana areas were separated from the then

Hyderabad state) took place. Ever since then, till the Party got split and he had to take over as General Secretary of the CPI(M), Sundarayya remained a member of the Andhra legislature.

Gopalan, on the other hand, continued to lead the Party group in the Lok Sabha for full 25 years—from 1952 to 1977 when he died. (In theory, it was not Gopalan but Dange who was the leader for the period 1957-62. In fact, however, Gopalan discharged all the tasks as earlier and later). Loved and respected by all members of parliament from the Prime Minister downwards, he exposed the misdeeds of the powers that be on the floor of parliament, as he had been doing outside the House, throughout his political activity for nearly three decades. Mastering the art of intervention on the floor of the House, he, however, did not confine himself to the House : ever moving among the people, listening to their tales of woe, he brought them back to the House demanding relief. The eminent political leader that he was, he studiously familiarised himself with all burning problems—national and international, economic, political and socio-cultural. His was the voice that gave expression to the most keenly-felt desires, agonies and demands of the people, the voice of patriotism and militant struggle.

Different though in style, Sundarayya was basically of the same type. The three years of his presence in the Rajya Sabha, followed by over a decade in the Andhra state legislature, showed him to be a revolutionary who was equally at home in the jungles of Telangana as well as the exalted Houses of the country's parliament or the state's legislature. The same mastery of details on the basic questions on which he had to speak as M.P. or M.L.A. now, as he showed earlier in leading the armed partisan groups in Telangana. The political adversaries who wanted to and did challange his conclusions could never challenge his facts. Here was a people's leader with over two decades of dedicated service of the people and abiding links with those whom he had been serving, who knew what he wanted to say and how to say. His speeches and other forms of intervention on the floor of the House reflected the deepest urges of the revolutionary people of India.

The first leaders of the two Houses of parliament who had established themselves, earlier as respected mass and Party leaders, now started proving themselves as eminent parliamentarians. Neither of them was, however, a parliamentarian of the ordinary (bourgeois) type. Not having the eloquence of their predecessors of the old Central Legislature (Motilal Nehru, M.A. Jinnah, Madan Mohan Malaviya and so on), they, however, proved equal to the task to be discharged by proletarian revolutionaries in their endeavour to use the forum of parliament to fight for the cause for which they were sent there by the Party and the people. No other party represented in the two Houses of parliament could claim such a pair of revolutionaries who were not spoiled by the virus of parliamentarism but used the forum of parliament as one of the fields of class revolutionary battles.

Under the leadership of these two outstanding revolutionaries in the two Houses were teams drawn from West Bengal, Andhra, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Tripura. Many were the leaders of the historic class and political battles—Telangana, Tebhaga, Tripura, Andhra and Malabar, railway and other militant strike struggles, states people's struggles, and so on. Many, besides Gopalan and Sundarayya, were veteran freedom fighters, and pioneers of the socialist/communist movement. Most of them were entering the arena of class struggle on the parliamentary front for the first time, they but quickly learnt the art of parliamentary intervention to further the cause of the revolutionary movement.

The parliamentary front, however, was only one important arena of the Party centre's work in Delhi. It had to be supplemented by the agitational, educational and organisational-practical activities of the C.C. and P.B. Running the central party organ in three languages—English, Hindi, and Urdu—bringing out a theoretical monthly, publication of pamphlets on current topics and bigger books on basic questions, running party schools, guiding party members working in mass organisations, maintaining contacts with other left or like-minded parties—all these jobs had to be undertaken. Furthermore, in the new circumstances in which international contacts were for the first time becoming possible in the history of our Party,

systematic work had to be done to keep fraternal relations with brotherly parties and movements.

The presence of party groups in the two Houses of parliament did help all these activities. They, however, could not be properly organised and integrated without a Party centre independent of the parliamentary groups in the two Houses. Hence the setting up of a central headquarters of the Party working side by side the parliamentary office. I was put in charge of this central headquarters as one of its key functionaries—in fact, the only P.B. member who was assisting the General Secretary, Ajoy Ghosh, in the day-to-day political-organisational work of the Party centre. On occasions when the General Secretary fell ill and had to go to Moscow for treatment, I was named the Acting General Secretary.

My stay and work in Delhi in this period widened my political-intellectual horizon as never before. The newly-opened opportunities to meet and exchange views with comrades from abroad helped me to understand the problems of the international movement, including those connected with applying the theory of Marxism-Leninism to changing world conditions and to the varying historical backgrounds of different countries. I also got acquainted with the scholars and academics (including academic-administrators who were engaged in the exercise of India's economic planning) from whom I learnt a lot, though I had to reject many of their conclusions. My work of guiding or participating in the work of the Party in some of the mass and socio-cultural organisations (particularly the Kisan Sabha, the women's organisation and the writers' movement) were of some value to the comrades concerned, and much more to me. The experience gathered in all this was used in the preparation of articles in the weekly and monthly *New Age*, and in writing some pamphlets.

Among the material that I put out in this period was a work of more lasting value which deserves mention. I am referring to the series of articles originally published in *New Age* monthly, reviewing the multi-volume biography of Mahatma Gandhi by B.G. Tendulkar. Written as monthly pieces in 1954-55, they were brought together in a booklet of about 125 pages under the title *The Mahatma and the Ism*; it

was subsequently translated into several Indian and a few foreign languages, including Russian and Japanese.

Undertaken as a matter of self-education, I am told, it benefitted several other comrades. To take one instance, Herbert Fischer, the last Counsel-General and first Ambassador of the German Democratic Republic in Delhi, told me that in writing his book on Gandhi in German, my book was of use to him and that he took extensive quotations from it. Like me who started his political life as a Gandhiite but overgrew his Gandhiite beginnings to become a critic of Gandhism, Fischer (a social democrat and anti-fascist in Germany) was an inmate of the Gandhi Ashram in Sevagram, Wardha, and saw Gandhi at close quarters. I could therefore be sharply critical of the philosophy and practice of Gandhism while still holding Gandhi-the-man in great esteem. I take it that this is Fischer's approach, too, though I have not had the benefit of reading his book which is still not available in English.

Before leaving this subject, let me express my criticism of two extremes in the assessment of Gandhi-the-man and his philosophy which are found in the writings of some of the foreign Marxists on the subject. There is one according to which Gandhi was nothing but a "counter-revolutionary who betrayed the revolutionary movement". This was the stuff on which we the young communists were educated in the early 1930s. This does not answer the question as to why Gandhi was able to win the hearts of millions. The other extreme holds that Gandhi was a "national revolutionary" who laid the foundations of the mass freedom movement. This does not answer the question as to why the Britishers' plot of partitioning India could not be foiled, why Gandhi himself fell to a Hindu fanatic's bullets and why the "great national organisation" he built fell into such straits that he, in his last recorded note, recommended its dissolution.

I answered the two questions by tracing the parallel development of the two facets of the class whose leader Gandhi was. Opposed as the class was to the British rule, its best spokesman became the charismatic leader of millions in the anti-imperialist freedom struggle in the course of which he upheld certain values of personal and political morality. Once the freedom

movement was over, however, that class had no use for these values; his advice for the rejection of India's partition was turned down by his loyal disciples in the Congress. Hence the personal agony and sense of frustration with which he recommended dissolution of the Congress in a written note he left behind just before he was shot to death. This is how I conclude my book on Gandhi and his ism.

CHAPTER 21

THE THIRD PARTY CONGRESS

ALTHOUGH THE IDEOLOGICAL-POLITICAL AND organisational problems which led to the inner-party crisis of 1948-1951 were formally resolved on the basis of the Programme and the Statement of Policy adopted at the October 1951 Party Conference, differences persisted on some questions and new differences cropped up since the reorganisation made at and after the 1951 Party Conference. Differences of both types were revealed in the course of the central work when I was staying in Delhi.

The differences of the first type—hang-over of the 1948-51 inner-party struggle—were the most acute in Andhra. They expressed themselves at two levels : firstly, concerning the interpretation of the Telangana movement, its continuation after the entry of the Indian army into Hyderabad and the movement's withdrawal in 1951; secondly, the integration of Party organisations in the Hyderabad and Madras region of Andhra. The two levels of differences together created a serious situation to which the C.C. had to pay attention.

It should be mentioned here that both the Telangana and the Telugu-majority districts of old Madras had sent a large number of M.P.s—both to the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. They were all leaders of the Telangana movement as well as of peasant struggles in the Telugu region of Madras. Those from the Telangana region included some who had raised the banner of revolt against the continuance of the movement; they had in fact, come overground to make public their criticism of the leadership of the movement. Now that the movement stood

withdrawn, they were in opposition to those who were instrumental in continuing the movement after the army entered Hyderabad. No amount of discussions in the Central Committee helped in creating a unified leadership for the Party in Andhra.

Added to problems like this in Andhra—a hang-over of the past—were new problems arising out of the new situation. In Kerala, I was personally connected with one such problem of the relation between our Party and its electoral allies in Travancore-Cochin. The RSP, the KSP and the Socialist Party who were allies in 1951 broke up relations with us after the elections. One of them, the RSP, even went for physical clashes. Still another, the Socialist Party, drifted from us after the 1952 elections, again forged an alliance in the 1954 elections, but then formed the "single-party socialist government" with Congress support after the elections. There was no complete agreement in our Party on how to regulate our relations with these parties. But neither in Travancore-Cochin nor in Malabar (where a number of Praja Party leaders joined the Congress after the 1952 elections) did these problems develop into acute inner-party conflicts as they did in Andhra.

One important development in Malabar during the years when I was working in Delhi, was the election to the Malabar District Board. Our Party and the Congress were the major contestants in the field but the Muslim League and the PSP were also present. Our Party came out as the biggest single party with only one short of the absolute majority of seats in the Board. A comrade of ours was elected President as neither the League nor the PSP was prepared to see a Congressmen occupy that office. This, in fact, was the precursor of the first elections to the Kerala state legislature in which our Party, with five pro-Party independents, secured an absolute majority. In the District Board election and the following work of the Board, however, I myself did not play any role.

The real problem facing the Party in the early 1950s, however, was how to assess and deal with the new positions adopted by the Congress and its central government. They took serious note of the reverses suffered in the 1952 elections, particularly in states where the Communist Party had emerged as a force to reckon with. The central Congress leadership's response was

the adoption of new manoeuvres intended to give it a "left" image.

The most important of these manoeuvres was in the field of foreign policy. Forging relations of friendship with the Soviet Union and People's China, raising the voice of struggle against colonialism, joining the newly-emerging nations in the Asian and African continents to develop anti-colonial struggles on a world scale, India was now slowly making a mark in the international camp of anti-imperialist fighters.

The new manoeuvres could not but have some impact on the internal, particularly agrarian, policy. Although the Telangana movement had been withdrawn, its impact on the ruling circles could be seen in the Bhoodan movement initiated by Vinoba Bhave and a series of land reform legislations sponsored by the Congress governments in several states.

Added to this was the slogan of socialistic pattern of society adopted at the Awadi Session of the Congress.

Another equally important fact was that the ruling party had to give up its earlier line of maintaining the biggest princely states (Travancore-Cochin, Mysore, Hyderabad, etc., and such combinations as Madhya Bharat, PEPSU, etc.); these and other states had to be merged with the neighbouring areas to form new states, more or less on linguistic lines. The reorganisation of states, and limited agrarian legislations, though undertaken under the compulsions of the militant struggles unleashed in various pasts of the country, created the impression that here was a ruling party and government responsive to the people's aspirations and movements.

The question, therefore, arose whether these developments in the policies of the ruling party should be seen in isolation or whether they should be understood as a change in the political complexion of the ruling classes which would then warrant a change in the Party's approach to the ruling party ? A section in the Party gave an unhesitating "yes" to the latter view. The ruling classes as a whole, and the ruling party—in particular, they said, had started "moving to the left". Beginning with an anti-imperialist foreign policy (which was already visible), they said, this "shift to the left" was bound to extend itself to internal policy. The question, in their view was simple : how

can a progressive foreign policy fail to exert its influence on internal policy ? The two, after all, were understood to be the integral parts of the policies of the same class.

This point of view had the vigorous support of our comrades abroad. The Soviet and Chinese comrades, who were increasingly becoming friendly with the Indian state and its political leaders, did everything to cultivate the latter, praising them for their anti-imperialism and internal reforms. It was in this context that some academicians in some socialist countries started "reinterpreting" the role of Mahatma Gandhi in the freedom movement; he had earlier been denounced as a counter-revolutionary but was now praised as a "great national leader". Some comrades in our Party took every pronouncement of such a nature made by the Soviet leaders, every article appearing in the journals of those fraternal parties, as a "guidance to Indian comrades".

The majority of comrades—not only in the Party ranks but the majority in the leadership itself—sharply disagreed with this view and held that however welcome the change in the foreign policy of the ruling party and its government be, it did not signify any change in the class character of the government least of all in the field of internal policy. While undoubtedly giving an anti-imperialist thrust to foreign policy the ruling party was far from taking such positions as the working class and its Party were striving to take the country to. So, while the Party must extend support to those elements of foreign policy which help the cause of world-wide struggle against imperialism, the Party must also independently popularise its programme based on the Marxist-Leninist understanding of the world situation. In no case must the illusion be created among the people that the anti-imperialist thrust in the field of foreign policy would automatically lead to progressive changes in internal policy.

The two lines confronted each other at the Third Congress of the Party held at Madurai (in Tamil Nadu) in the last week of December, 1953. Among those who attended the session as guests was the British C.P. General Secretary, Harry Politt, whose greetings to the delegates encouraged those pleading for a change in the Party's approach to the Congress government. That did influence a section of the delegates but the majority

declined to accept Politt's advice; the Party stuck to its line of opposition to the Congress regime and its class policies while extending support to those elements of foreign policy which helped the world-wide struggle of socialist and other anti-imperialist forces against colonialism and war.

Before closing this chapter, mention should be made of an article by a Soviet academician, Rubenstein, which appeared shortly after the Party Congress. The article which appeared in a Soviet Party journal, advocated the line of CPI support to the Nehru regime. Some comrades interpreted this as a "Soviet advice to our Party" and demanded revision of the line adopted at Party Congress. Not only did the C.C. reject this demand but sent an article by General Secretary Ajoy Ghosh which rebutted ihe Rubenstein article; the rejoinder too was duly published in the same Soviet journal.

Although the controversies that raged in the Party before the Third Congress and were reflected in the Congress were thus settled for the time being, they hotted up again and cast their shadow over the Party's activities between the Third and Fourth Congresses. In the meanwhile, however, the world communist movement was being shaken by a big storm which blew over every fraternal Party, including ours. We will, therefore, now address ourselves to these developments.

CHAPTER 22

KHRUSCHOVISM AND THE CPI

THE SOVIET PARTY'S FIRST SECRETARY, NIKITA Khruschov, and Prime Minister, Bulganin, undertook an official visit to India some months after the third Congress of our Party took place. They were given magnificent receptions all over the country—the first occasion when the Soviet leaders and the Indian people were having rapport with each other.

Right from the birth of the first land of socialism in the world, the then rulers of the country (the British) did their utmost to keep our people completely ignorant of and broadcast slanders about the new socialist state. It was through the speeches and writings of political leaders and intellectuals of the freedom movement that small sections of the people began to see that here was a new society rising on the ashes of an old one. It, however, took full eight years after the country won freedom, for the people here to see and listen to the authoritative spokesmen of the new world—a memorable occasion indeed.

I was then working in Delhi, and participated in several demonstrations in the city during the days of the two leaders' stay there. It is difficult to describe in words what I felt in those days. My country, my people were having a direct rapport with the land of socialism, the symbol of all that we communists held dear. Lakhs of men and women in our country were now getting an opportunity to get first-hand information on how the new socialist society was developing in a part of the world, and began to think about how to apply the lessons of

that country's experience in socialist construction to our own concrete conditions.

A quarter of a century ago when I had my first acquaintance with the literature on socialist construction in the USSR (the first five year plan), the knowledge then available about what was then called the "Russian experiment" was meagre, and the circle of those who were interested in the truth about that country narrow. Now, on the other hand, lakhs were listening to the speeches of the two Soviet guests and were getting captivated. The ice had been broken, helping us communists in our work of popularising the achievements of not only the USSR but other socialist countries—those of East Europe and China.

As against this positive gain of the Khrushchov-Bulganin visit, however, there was a negative aspect as well—the push that their pronouncements gave to the pro-Congress line which had started making its appearance in the country in general, in the Party in particular. The relations of friendship and cooperation between India and the USSR, which had been forged earlier but were now being strengthened with the Soviet leaders' visit, reflected themselves in such of their pronouncements as would be used by the Congress leaders in their anti-communist campaign. As a matter of fact, the speeches and other pronouncements made during their sojourn in India were extensively used in the bitterly-fought election campaign in Andhra (February-March 1955) when lakhs of copies of these pronouncements were printed by the Congress officially as material for its election campaign. Dozens of candidates set up by the Party were defeated by small margins of a few hundred votes. It was clear that a section of those, who upto then had reposed their confidence in the Party, switched their loyalty to the Congress because it advocated a policy of cooperation with the USSR and China and posed as a party fighting for socialism.

More, however, was to follow the electoral debacle. When the Party went to the polls, it was expected that Andhra would be the first state in India with a non-Congress government headed by the CPI—a calculation which created great enthusiasm among the friends and concern among the opponents of the

Party all over the country. It was in such a state that the Party met with a humiliating debacle which stunned the comrades as well as sympathisers.

The reason for the debacle, some argued, was that while the leaders of the ruling party were pursuing anti-imperialist policies as recognised even by our comrades and friends abroad, our Party leadership was following the same old "discredited, sectarian line". They, therefore, demanded a complete change in the line—to begin with, in the field of foreign policy which, in due course, would have to be extended to internal policy as well; it was argued that "anti-imperialist foreign policy would inevitably lead to changes in internal policies in a progressive direction". The demand was thus made for a reversal of Party policies, both in the foreign and the internal fields.

This, was opposed by a majority in the Central Committee and Polit Bureau. Within this majority, of course, there were shadows of differences on important details. But all of them agreed that, however welcome the changes in the government's foreign policy were, they did not affect the internal policy which continued to be anti-people and was therefore to be firmly fought. This point of view found expression in the draft political resolution prepared by the C.C. majority for pre-Congress discussion in the entire Party. Since the draft expressed the views of the majority only, the minority was allowed to prepare its own alternative draft for pre-Congress discussion. The shades of difference which a group of comrades had with the majority, were also reduced to writing and circulated for pre-Congress discussion.

There were thus three points of view on which pre-Congress discussion started : the C.C. draft (with which I agreed), the alternative draft critical of the majority from the rightist angle, and still another which was in broad agreement with the majority but differed from it in important respects. All of them being thrown open for discussion, comments from the Party members and units all over the country came and were published in a special publication called *Forum*. The entire exercise took several months, with all the pre-Congress Conferences (at the district and state levels in particular) being turned into a debate on the issues posed in the drafts.

This had its advantages as well as disadvantages. The advantage was that the entire Party got involved in the evolution of Party policy, to be finalised at the Party Congress. As opposed to this was the disadvantage that the major (if not the only) issue debated in the state and lower level conferences was the all-India policy, the review of work at every lower level becoming the casualty. Furthermore, the comrades who held different points of view were so vehement in their arguments that they became so many groups in one and the same Party unit.

As a member of the Central Committee who shared the views of the majority in the Committee, I attended and intervened in the discussions of two conferences—Travancore-Cochin and Malabar. The majority in the former supported the draft of the C.C. majority while the latter was in favour of the alternate draft from the right. It will be interesting to note that all those who then took one or another position, did not continue to adopt those positions in the subsequent inner-party struggles which culminated in the 1964 split of the Party and the post-split developments.

On the eve of the Party Congress which was to sum up the inner-party debate on the C.C. draft, we—not only our Party in India but the entire world communist movement—were stunned by the new line adopted by the Soviet Party at its Twentieth Congress. Another world war being "not fatalistically inevitable", the need and possibility of peaceful coexistence of the two (capitalist and socialist) systems in the world, and peaceful transformation of capitalism into socialism being on the agenda in some countries—such was the perspective mapped out by the leadership of the CPSU in its assessment of the world situation. Added to this was the unbridled attack on the role played by Stalin—what was called his "personality cult" in his last days.

Coming as these did on the eve of (just two months before) our Fourth Party Congress, they cast a shadow over the deliberations of the Congress. They gave new confidence to those who opposed the C.C. draft from the right. Those who had shades of difference with the C.C. but were anxious to defeat those attacking the draft from the right, therefore, decided to withdraw their separate draft and vote for the C.C. draft.

The debate and final voting at the Party Congress, therefore, centered around the sharply and clearly posed issue : whether or not to have "a united front of all, from the Congress to the communists, leading to the formation of a coalition government". The fact that one-third of the delegates voted in favour of the rightist proposal, showed that the danger of a "shift to the right" in the Party's policy was very real. It was only the combination of forces supporting the C.C. draft and those who, while opposing the draft which advocated a shift to the right, had shades of differences with the C C. draft, that brought the defeat of the line which wanted a united front and coalition government with the Congress. It may be noted in anticipation of later developments that this very line of collaboration was what came to be adopted by the post-split CPI which went in a coalition with the Congress in Kerala, the only state where this was permitted by the Congress.

The Party Congress did not take up for discussion the new line adopted by the CPSU at its Twentieth Congress on which, of course, there were sharp differences. After the Congress, however, the new C.C expressed itself on one aspect of the Twentieth CPSU Congress deliberations—criticism of the "personality cult" of Stalin—and conveyed its views to the CPSU Central Committee. Views similar to our Central Committee's had, in the meanwhile, been expressed by several other parties which, however, were not known to us, as ours were not known to them. We pointed out to the CPSU, as many others did, that their manner of criticism was such that all that was positive in Stalin's life was virtually negated. Furthermore, it was wrong to single out Stalin for the failure of the collective leadership of the CPSU. The total effect of the criticism—its form and content—was such that it weakened the world communist movement.

Before closing this chapter, it may be useful to recall that there was at that time complete unity in the international movement on the role played by India, its ruling classes, in world politics. The leaderships of all fraternal parties, including the CPSU and the CPC, were unanimous that India under Nehru's leadership was helping the cause of anti-colonialism, world peace and social progress. Just like the visit of Khruschov and

Bulganin to India and of Nehru and other leaders to the Soviet Union, Zhou Enlai's visit to India and Nehru's to China made a big impact on the Indian people.

In fact, Sino-Indian relations had started improving earlier and had greater and more lasting impact than Indo-Soviet relations did. India and China were after all two countries with the most ancient civilisations; their unity in the anti-colonial struggle had inspired millions of freedom fighters all over Asia, Africa and Latin America who banded themselves in a new international movement called non-alignment. The Congress leaders could make as much political use of the pronouncements of the Chinese comrades as those of the Soviet leaders in their campaign against Indian communists. So could the comrades inside the Party use the positions adopted by the Chinese Party to claim that they had the blessings of the entire international movement.

CHAPTER 23

THE CHINESE PARTY CONGRESS

WITHIN SEVEN MONTHS OF THE TWENTIETH CPSU Congress, the Eighth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party was held (in September 1956) in Beijing. I was asked to lead a three-member delegation to attend the Congress, P.C. Joshi and P. Sundarayya being the other members of the delegation.

Taking off from Calcutta and flying via Bangkok—my first taste of being on foreign soil, though we did not leave the airport—we landed at Hongkong from where we were taken by rail to the border village of Shengzhen where from we crossed into the Chinese territory on foot. We were received by a representative of the CPC Central Committee, Comrade Liao, who was our guide for more than a fortnight, till we left Beijing in the first week of October.

Twenty-seven years later (in 1983) I was to cross the same border together with H.K.S. Surjeet and M. Basavapunnaiah after completing our three-week visit to China. There was no comparison between the the two Shengzhens : from the small village in rural China on the border which Shengzhen was in 1956, it had by now developed into a part of a big "Special Economic Zone", an experiment in cooperation between the socialist state of China and big monopoly capitalists from abroad. Between my two visits to China, enormous changes had taken place within India and China, in each of the two communist parties and in the relations between them. While, in 1956, I was leading a fraternal delegation of the united Communist Party, the 1983 delegation led by me was instrumental

in restoring the fraternal relations between the CPI (M) and the CPC after 16 years of broken relationship. Never had I imagined that the small village of 1956 would flower into a centre of big construction projects—carried out with foreign collaboration—which it was in 1983.

Having crossed the border into China, the (1956) delegation boarded a special train where I had the first taste of being treated as an honoured guest of the ruling party of a socialist country. Reaching the city of Canton (Quangdong) in the evening, we were joined by comrades from Ceylon now (Sri Lanka) and Nepal. All of us were taken next forenoon on a sight-seeing trip. We visited the site of the School for Peasant Activists of the early 1920s when there was perfect cooperation between the Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomingtang. Still another place we visited was a farm that was being organised on the cooperative principle—the first glimpse of the Chinese People's Republic moving towards socialism.

Our trip from Quangdong to Beijing was by a special plane, with a short stay at Wuhan. Landing at the Beijing airport, we were pleasantly surprised to see two top leaders of the Chinese Party, Chu Teh and Liu Shaoqi—next only to Mao—waiting to receive us. We of the Indian delegation were then taken to a special VIP guest house—an honour reserved only for a few fraternal delegations from the non-socialist countries. Our whole stay in China since then—almost a full month—was a sort of "VIP life" for all the three of us, and Mrs. Sundarayya who also accompanied us.

This was the first occasion in my life when I was having direct personal contact with foreign comrades, many of whom I had known by name and looked with awe from a distance. Our interest was roused all the more because some of the Parties represented there, had undergone big convulsions as the aftermath of the Soviet Party's critique of Stalin's "personality cult". Many were still engaged in partisan or still more organised military actions for liberating their countries from foreign rule. After a brief get-together thrown by the CPC leadership to the guests, we were all in a position to freely mingle among ourselves in the lobby of the Congress hall. Special bilateral talks were also arranged between the Indian delegation and some other

delegations. Special mention should be made of the Polish, the Vietnamese and the Algerian delegations. The first because following the 20th CPSU Congress, there were convulsions in the government and the Party in that country; the second because, while one-half of the country had already been liberated, armed struggle was still going on in the rest of the country; as for the last, the whole country was engaged in armed struggle for liberation.

Beijing then was the centre of a big get-together for the representatives of various contingents of the world communist movement. The bitter feud between the Yugoslav and other fraternal parties had come to an end, and the Yugoslav Party was represented at such a gathering for the first time after several years. Behind the apparent camraderie, however, were tensions which could not be completely suppressed : the apparent endorsement of the line of the Twentieth CPSU Congress covered up reservations which came into the open only years later. Failing to gauge the depth and intensity of these tensions, I was more carried away by the appearance of unity with which fraternal parties gathered in Beijing.

Watching the proceedings of the Congress itself, I saw nothing unusual in Mao making only a brief speech of welcome to guests from the fraternal parties, while Liu Shaoqui made the C.C. report to the Congress, Zhou Enlai the report on the work of the government, and Deng Xiaoping the report on organisation and Party constitution. It took several years for me to understand that the seeds of the convulsions that rocked the Chinese Party—the "Gaeat Leap Forward" and the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution"—had already been sown. Two decades later, the Chinese leadership was to make a complete reassessment of Party history, according to which the major mistake that led to the tragedy was that Party had strayed from the correct path mapped out at the Eighth Congress (which I had attended). The tragedy that overtook the Chinese Party since the Eighth Congress overtook our Party as well.

Besides attending the Party Congress, I had to deliver a message to Zhou Enlai which our General Secretary, Ajoy Ghosh, had entrusted me with. Zhou was to make an official visit to India; if it took place before the second general election, due in four months, it was apprehended that his pronounce-

ments would be used as material for election campaign by the Congress, as the Soviet leaders' pronouncements had earlier been used in the Andhra election campaign. He was, therefore, to be requested to put off his visit to some time after the elections. I duly conveyed the message. Zhou disagreed and said that, in his view, the visit would help us in our election campaign.

This would show how our two parties differed on the impact the leader of a socialist country appreciating the government of India would make on the Indian people, and the problems it would create for us. It showed incidentally, that the Soviet and Chinese comrades had the same perception of India, its ruling classes, the relation between the foreign and internal policies of our ruling classes, etc. The subsequent shift in the Chinese position vis-a-vis the Indian ruling classes—their later assessment that Nehru was "India's Chiang Kai-shek"—strengthened my conviction that the comrades in socialist countries were judging the ruling classes of capitalist countries solely from the stand the latter adopted towards socialist countries.

On my own, I wanted a discussion with Liu Shaoqi whose works—his summing up of the inner-party struggle in the CPC, the work entitled *How to Be A Good Communist* in particular—had attracted me a great deal. I was struck by the series of inner-party campaigns for "rectification of the politics and organisation of the Party". It was through these repeated inner-party campaigns, I came to believe, that the Chinese Party could put an end to the right and "left" mistakes which repeatedly made their appearance in the Party. Having gone through the experience of inner-party struggle in our own Party which, I was afraid, might again fall prey to right and "left" deviations, I wanted to learn from Liu how to carry on the struggle against the two deviations in our Party. His brief and pointed reply was that the essence of correct inner-party struggle was to make a concrete study of the concrete conditions in the concerned country and, basing on such an objective study, work out appropriate strategy and tactics for the Party in question. "Our Party", he added, "may be prepared, if your Party desires, to appoint a commission to make a joint study of the problems along with a commission of your Party."

This, it may be recalled, was the substance of what Liu Ning Yi had told me when I had met him in Calcutta during the months of my underground life there. This was also the essence of what the CPSU delegation headed by Stalin had told our Party delegation in Moscow. There was no magic wand with which our Party, like any fraternal Communist Party, could steer clear of right and "left" deviations. Concrete study of concrete conditions—collective study by the Party in and through pratical activity, rather than individual study by comrades from the academic standpoint—this was the only way through which inner-party struggle would lead to fruitful results. That the Chinese Party itself had to go through this difficult path to solve the problems thrown up after the Eighth Congress, has now become clear.

I also benefitted from two discussions arranged by the CPC Central Committee for the foreign comrades—on the agrarian revolution, and party organisation in China. I cannot say that much of new light was thrown on the two problems, as I had already read a lot from official (governmental and Party) publications. After all, I had learnt (from the CPSU delegation earlier and from Liu Shaoqui now) that our Party could not mechanically follow the path adopted in China but would have to struggle itself to find the correct path to its revolution.

After the Congress was over, there was a gala dinner in which all the Chinese and foreign delegates joined. Enormous food and drinks were served, far more than I could stomach. Toast after toast was proposed, most of them by Prime Minister Zhou Enlai who would insist on *gambai* (bottoms up) for every toast. "That man is unbeatable," I heard somebody remarking.

At my table was an eminent general to act as the chief host. I took the occasion to put to him a blunt question: "Now that you have emancipated the mainland, how long will you take to free Hong Kong?" I remembered the half-hour or so I spent in that foreign-occupied city on the mainland. Why did it conti nue like that? I did not get a straight reply then, but I got it 27 years later—during my second visit to China. The British occupation authorities have been forced to agree to Chinese sovereignty on Hong Kong by 1997.

The final and most inspiring event during our stay in Beijing

was the National Day (October 1) celebration, organised after the Party Congress was over. Wave after wave of the Chinese soldiers and civilians in colourful costumes passed through the stand where Chairman Mao was taking the salute. With him stood leaders of other states and governments including Indonesia's Sukarno and, if I remember right, the Prime Minster of Nepal. I was to see the like of this in later years in Moscow and Berlin on the National Days of the USSR and the GDR i.e. November 7 and October 6, respectively. I had of course, seen the National and Republic Days of India (August 15 and January 26, respectively) which were colourful no doubt but not like the National Day celebrations of a socialist republic.

Before proceeding to describe my visit to other cities of socialist China, I must mention a few cultural items like three or four operas, going round one or two youth homes, a sports and games competition of young people, visits to some of the most valuable monuments like the Imperial Palace, etc. Here was a country with a civilisation as ancient as India's but now more modern than ours—a people's democratic state rapidly going forward to socialism as opposed to ours which continued to be a bourgeois republic, though its leaders tried to paint that bourgeois republic in "socialist" colours.

On my return journey to India, I was alone, Joshi and Sundarayya staying back for more sight-seeing. Leaving Beijing on October 3 or 4, I spent a couple of days each in Shanghai, Wuhan, Chung King and Kunming, leaving the last city for India via Rangoon, the first capital of a non-socialist foreign country where I had to stay for a couple of days.

While in Shanghai I went round a textile mill which was jointly owned and managed. The former proprietor was one of the two co-directors, the other being a representative of the Chinese government. The two directors met me together and put across the idea of gradual transition to socialism "with the consent of the proprietors". Later on, when I reached Chung King, I was told (by P.C. Joshi who was already there) that a conference of such private capitalists was going on; Joshi himself had witnessed the proceedings.

There was no doubt that new experiments were going on. "With power firmly in the hands of the proletariat", we were

told, experiments were worth making. Twenty seven years later, in the Sheng Zhen Special Economic Zone, we were told that the Chinese were confident of "digesting" foreign capital since the latter was coming to the land of proletarian dictatorship. "There is, of course, the danger of ideological corruption following the entry of foreign capital", the comrades added, "but we are vigilant."

Chung King was, during the war years, the administrative capital of the Kuomintang government with which the Communist Party and its government in the liberated areas of China had relations of a peculiar kind—diplomatically "correct" but politically hostile. The accredited representative of the liberated areas' government, Zhou Enlai, was then staying in the same city as Chiang Kai-shek but as a virtual prisoner. The house where he and Madam Zhou lived in those days is now kept as a museum open to the visitors. I did go round the whole house, with my respect for the man and the Party which he served with distinction, raised high. I had read earlier—and subsequently saw in a film—how an anti-Japanese group of armymen had arrested Chiang Kai-shek, was keeping him prisoner, and how Zhou used his good offices to get his adversary released. That was the man who later had to spend a few years as the virtual prisoner of the very same Chiang.

When I took leave of my Chinese comrades at Kunming, I had the satisfaction that a window to the socialist world had just opened before me. That it was yet far from real socialism was, of course, true. I had not yet seen the first land of socialism in the world but this showed how, in our own country, a real modern democracy would lay the basis for socialism in the future.

CHAPTER 24

OFFICE WITH NO REAL POWER

WITHIN FOUR MONTHS OF MY COMING BACK from China, I got involved in the campaign for elections to the Legislative Assembly of the newly-formed state of Kerala as well as for elections on the Lok Sabha seats in the state. The Assembly constituency I was contesting from was part of the Lok Sabha constituency being contested by A.K. Gopalan.

The United Front that had been formed to contest the first general elections five years earlier, had been broken up. Although we called upon our allies of 1952 in Malabar and of 1953-54 in Travancore-Cochin to put up a joint struggle against the Congress, they (the RSP, PSP and KSP) rejected our appeal and went to the electorate on their own. Our Party, therefore, had to fight on its own, along with a few independents, some of whom were supported by some other non-Congress parties as well. Since there was no united front of opposition parties, it was assumed outside Kerala that the Congress would have no difficulty in securing a comfortable majority in the first Legislative Assembly of this new state. Our Party's General Secretay, Ajoy Ghosh, himself made public pronouncements to that effect which I had to repudiate in public.

This was necessary in the interests of the election campaign I was then engaged in. For, Ghosh's public statement was creating demoralisation among our comrades and supporters. Furthermore, the picture of political Kerala he had before him was far from true: as opposed to the divided opposition (which was, of course, depressing) was the fact that the ruling circles were equally, if not more, divided.

Ranged against the Congress was, in the Malabar area, the Muslim League which had the Praja Socialist Party as its ally—a plus factor for both parties. The Legue had a few pockets of predominantly Muslim voters where it could easily win on its own, while there were a few areas where the PSP had its own independent mass base. This combination helped both these parties to win a larger number of seats than in any previous election.

The political gain for the Muslim League was that, so far confined to the Malabar area, it could, for the first time, expand itself to the Travancore-Cochin area. The PSP, too, won many seats (particularly in the Malabar area) which it would have lost otherwise. The alliance of the two parties helped the weakening of the Congress, thus indirectly helping the opposition, including the CPI.

The Congress itself—particularly in the Travancore-Cochin area—had traditionally been dominated by the Christians and, therefore, it incurred the wrath of the caste Hindus, sections of whom did not mind the Congress getting defeated in constituencies where they could play some role. While this helped the PSP and other opposition candidates in several constituencies, the communist candidates also benefitted in some places. The reason for this, was that those who were interested in seeing the Congress defeated found in the local CPI candidates who had considearble support of their own, as ones who could win if only they got marginal support, and this the former could provide. The intricacies of Kerala politics—division in the ruling classes which was far deeper than anywhere else in the country—were not clear to the CPI General Secretary, Ajoy Ghosh. He made the simplistic assessment that, since the opposition was divided, the Congress would easily win—an assumption which was proved baseless.

It should, however, be noted that, though the Communist Party won many more seats than the Congress, the latter had a marginal edge in terms of votes polled. This, in other words, was the first time that the electoral system (due to the absence of proportional representation) which had normally worked in favour of the Congress, worked against it. Even with the division among its adversaries, however, the CPI could not win more

than 60 seats on its own, i.e., in constituencies where it had its official candidates fighting on the Party symbol. This was three seats less than what was required for an absolute majority; only with the support of five independents could the Party form a government with majority support in the Assembly.

As against this initial weakness of the Party's position in the Assembly was its inherent strength among the people of the state, born out of the two-decade-long mass and political struggle through which it had emerged as a force to reckon with. No other political organisation or party had such a fund of experience in organising mass struggles, such a clear perception of the direction in which the new state of Kerala could advance within the framework of free India, such large numbers of dedicated servants of the people drawn from all classes and social strata under such a united leadership. It was thanks to these positive factors that those who were disgusted with the doings of the Congress in the Travancore-Cochin and Malabar areas, saw in the Communist Party the force which could not only defeat the Congress at the polls but offer a real people's alternative to the Congress government.

During the election campaign itself we had a taste of what was to come, securing a majority in the Assembly and proceeding to form a government. Ranged against A.K. Gopalan, who was contesting for the northern-most Lok Sabha seat, was an "independent" who had the support of the Congress as well as many others united by their common hatred for the communists. The bitter battle for the seat was a forerunner of the anti-communist unity that was to be forged against our government after the elections. The "independent" was, no doubt, defeated and Gopalan resumed his position as the leader of the major opposition group in the Lok Sabha. Together with the majority secured in the Assembly and the formation of the government by the Party, this enhanced our Party's prestige among the people in the state and outside.

Having secured a majority of seats, the 60 members who were elected as Party candidates and the five who won as CPI-supported independents, met and formed themselves into the Communist Legislature Party and elected me as their leader. This was duly followed by my staking the claim to form a

government. The Governor (a Congressman, the former Chief Minister of Hyderabad), however, did not accept my claim till he personally interviewed all the five independents to "satisfy himself" that they would really support our government. The first obstacle thus cleared, the governor sought to create another obstacle; he nominated a Congressman from among the Anglo-Indians (which is provided for in the constitution), and rejected my demand that the nomination be made after I was sworn in as Chief Minister and on the basis of my recommendation. With this addition of one to the Assembly members opposed to our government (from 61 to 62) and reduction of our number to 64 when one of the 65 was elected Speaker, we had to manage with a wafer-thin majority of two (64 against 62).

These two obstacles the Governor created by using his "constitutional authority", were only the beginning. At the political level, the Congress leadership in the state itself and at the central level launched a vicious campaign propagating that the people of the state had started feeling a "sense of insecurity" since the communists "do not respect the constitution and the rule of law". The opposition in the legislature, the big monopoly press, the radio and all other publicity media were used to poison the people's minds with vile lies and slanders against the Party and its government.

While the Congress as an organisation was engaged in such activities, the spokesmen of the central government followed a slightly different line. The Prime Minister, in his communications to us and his press interviews, adopted what may be called a "correct" attitude of "making no distinction" between states ruled by his party Chief Ministers and Kerala; and the President, in his speech on Independence Day (August 15) in Trivandrum, called for "co-existence of states ruled by different parties in different states and at the centre", citing Kerala as an example.

Behind this appearance of tolerance, however, was the reality that on issue after issue, the centre was creating problems for the Kerala government. The Prime Minister, on his part, donned the mantle of an elderly statesman, "advising and admonishing" the communist government of Kerala in the same

manner as the Congress governments in the rest of the country. These, however, proved good material for the leaders of the Congress organisation for launching vicious campaigns against the Kerala government.

On the basis of this campaign throughout the country, the Congress Legislature Party and its allies (the PSP in particular) mounted an offensive against the government on every conceivable issue. The Muslim League group in the legislature and the Nair Service Society outside did not join this tirade in the beginning. The former was not yet sure about how the Congress would deal with it; having had the bitter experience of the Congress government's attitude to the Muslim minority and comparing it with that of the Communist Party, the League did not want to join the anti-communist camp led by the Congress without making sure of its future. The Nair Service Society too, could not in the beginning trust the "Christian-dominated" Congress. It took some time before these inhibitions of the two basically anti-communist groups could be broken.

The communist government, in the meanwhile, was adopting measures which created an impression among the non-party masses belonging to all caste-communal groups, that here was a government that served the poor, thus carrying forward the best traditions of the freedom and general democratic movement in the country. One of the first declarations I made as Chief Minister was that the new government would try to implement those measures to which the Congress and its government were committed on paper but failed to carry out in practice. Attempting to carry this out was the "sin" committed by us during our 28 months in office.

The cardinal issue, to which priority was given in the work of the government, was *agrarian reform*. This was, in one sense a complicated task because there were different systems of land tenure in the three parts—Malabar, Cochin and Travancore—which had now been merged in the state of Kerala. But in another sense, it was simple because the question of eviction of tenants cultivating agricultural lands and occupants of house-sites was common from one end of the state to the other. The government, therefore, issued, within a week of assuming office,

an ordinance banning all evictions; work started, at the same time, of preparing a comprehensive legislation giving as much relief as possible to all sections of working peasants. The recommendations made by the Land Reforms Panel of the Planning Commission became the basis on which we prepared the outlines for the legislation.

This had a great impact on the common people—rural as well as urban. Far more than the actual provisions of the legislation, was the fact that here was a government which, for the first time in history, was breaking the back of the rural gentry, of the landlords who let their lands on rent to tenants, and those who allowed the houseless people to put up residential huts on vacant lands in return for rent and other obligations. Those who were subjected to oppression and exploitation arising out of this system, were now being liberated. This created, on the one hand, a sense of joy and relief among the poor and middle classes while, on the other hand, it angered the better-off sections of society. The Congress and its anti-communist allies started wooing the latter for fighting the Communist Party and its government.

Parallel to this in the rural agrarian sector, in the urban-industrial sector an end was put to the use of the police in strikes. The *new police policy* categorically declared that it was not the police but the labour department that dealt with industrial relations; the job of the police was to track down the anti-social and criminal elements. This, like the agrarian policy, inspired the common people but incurred the wrath of the vested interests. The campaign against the "insecurity of person and property", "breakdown of law and order", "demoralisation of the police force", etc. received a big boost in the local and national press.

Noteworthy here is the *industrial policy* outlined and being implemented by our government. A part of the country with maximum unemployment and minimum industrialisation, Kerala could not solve its problems without setting up industries in a big way. Since this required generous assistance from the centre or huge resources for the state itself—in fact, a combination of both—and while neither was readily available, we had to depend on the private sector. We, therefore, took the

initiative to get private industrialists from outside the state to set up industries here. Our opponents sought to create the impression that we would fail in the effort because our Party was, in principle, opposed to the private sector while the latter would hesitate to invest in a state where the "law and order" situation was so uninviting.

This, however, was disproved when one of the biggest businessmen in the country, the Birlas, came forward with a big project—a rayon factory. Though this raised a big controversy in the state and outside and though the Party Central Committee itself criticised some of the terms of the agreement the general public appreciated our measures for setting up industries which had to be done in the private sector. Our agreement with the Birlas proved conducive for setting up of certain other industries as well—for instance, a tyre factory.

Still another issue on which people were roused was the introduction of *a new education bill* which conceded many of the demands of the teachers and non-teaching employees. The bill put an end to the unbridled power of the private managements of schools. Welcomed by lakhs of teachers and the common people, it was stoutly opposed by the Christian churches, the Nair Service Society and other organisations which constituted the "corporate managers". The Christian organisations in particular raised the question of "religion in danger" and called upon the community to resist the bill with full force. The Nair Service Society joined forces with the Christian churches after some time while, with its intimate relations with the landed gentry, the Society was still more vehement on the agrarian question than the Christian churches were.

It is necessary to mention here a controversy that raged for some time over the question of *reservation* for the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward communities on which issue an entirely novel suggestion was made by a committee on administrative reforms headed by me. The suggestion was that while reservation should continue as it is (solely on caste basis) for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, it should be modified in relation to other backward communities : caste-

based reservation must continue for these communities also but with a proviso that those who belong to these communities but have an annual family income above a fixed level should be denied the benefits of reservation.

The proposal was objected to from two opposite ends. On the one side were the representatives of the "forward" communities who wanted reservation to be purely on economic grounds. The "backward" community leaders, on the other hand, attacked the new proposal, calling it as a denial of the "fundamental right" of the oppressed castes and communities to "social justice". The strength of public opinion was such that our Party itself decided to reject the proposal. It should, however, be noted that not only was the proposal endorsed by another committee a few years later in Kerala itself, but it became the accepted line of left movement in the whole country.

On none of the questions—agrarian, police, industrial or educational policies—could the national leadership of the Congress party or the central government take objection to what our government was doing: we were not overstepping the limits of central policies. Nevertheless, the organisational leadership of the Congress party at the central level blessed the state leadership in its anti-government campaign in Kerala, while the central government put spokes in the wheel of the state government's constructive proposals, refusing to give presidential assent to the two key legislative measures—the land reform and the education bills. They were, in fact, sent back to the state and by that time the communist government was dismissed.

The process through which this was accomplished will be explained in the next chapter. It may, in the meanwhile, be interesting to cite an observation made by the leader of the Polish delegation to our delegation at the time of the Eighth CPC Congress. "Your Party is out of power", he said, "and you are having certain problems. Ours is in power and yet we are having problems." Those were the days when, following the critique of Stalin's "cult of personality", the Polish and other fraternal parties in eastern Europe were having convulsions of one kind or another.

I was reminded of this when we apparently came to be

placed in the seat of power while we had no real power; far from having the power to implement the policies of our own Party, we did not even have the power to earnestly carry out what the Congress as a national party and its central government had promised to the people. The fate that awaited the Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill and the Education Bill, and the dismissal of our government by the centre confirmed the correctness of the distinction between formal ministerial office and real state power.

I may add here another observation I myself made during my first visit to Moscow. "What are your problems as the Communist Chief Minister in your State?" was the question put to me. "I have not many problems", I replied. "There is however, one which appears crucial : I am supposed to be the head of government of a state which is to work under a central government against which, as the member of my Party, I am fighting." That sums up the predicament in which I found myself for those 28 months.

CHAPTER 25

THE "KERALA WAY" I

THE FORMATION OF THE FIRST COMMUNIST government of Kerala a few months after the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU was claimed (by several people within and outside the communist movement) to be a confirmation of the correctness of the line of "peaceful, parliamentary path" of transition to socialism. For the first time in world history, it was said, the communists had succeeded in winning a majority in a free election. If this could take place in Kerala now, why could it not in other states of India in the future ? The simple formula was : "Today Kerala, tomorrow other states, in the end the Centre."

How divorced this perspective was from reality was seen in the very first days of the work of our government narrated in the preceding pages. The hostility with which the leaders of the ruling party and the central government looked at the Kerala developments, was clear from the steps taken against the single non-Congress government formed in that corner of the country. This was understandable, as the "experiment" tried here could become infectious, making the common people aware of the yawning gap between the professions and practices of the Congress party, conscious of the need to fight this party and its government and alive to the fact that the Communist Party might become the force with which the struggle against the Congress government would be carried to success. The continued existence of this government, therefore, constituted a real threat to the bourgeois-landlord rule symbolised by the Congress government at the centre and in other states

Hence the vehemence with which the Congress leaders launched their attacks from the very beginning—attacks which culminated two years later (in 1959) in the "liberation struggle" from below and dismissal from above.

However, for certain reasons listed below, it was not at all easy for the Congress leadership and the Central government to make a frontal assault.

Firstly, the parliamentary democratic system under which the central and state governments are formed, made the state government as legitimate as the central; the centre therefore could not arbitrarily dismiss the state government without violating the norms of parliamentary democracy

Secondly, the Kerala government was functioning strictly within the four corners of not only the constitution of India but also of the broad socio-economic policies which were laid down by the Congress as an anti-imperialist national organisation of the country earlier and as the ruling party at the centre now. By no stretch of legal quibbling could the Kerala government be accused of violating the constitution or going against the national policies.

This could be seen in the last weeks of the existence of the Kerala government, when the anti-communists in Kerala were preparing themselves for the final "liberation struggle" with the avowed aim of "paralysing the work of the communist government." The methods adopted were such as would have been denounced as "violent", "unconstituional", etc. had they been adopted in any other state by the non-Congress opposition. And yet they had the blessings of the Congress "High Command", of which the Prime Minister's daughter, Indira Gandhi, was the formal head as the Congress President. The Prime Minister himself could not disown his responsibility : if had he in fact put his foot down (as he would have done in any other state whose Congress government had to face a similar situation), there would have been no "liberation struggle" in Kerala.

No objective study of political affairs in India can fail to observe that the role played by Nehru in the anti-communist united front and the "liberation struggle" in Kerala, was that of a typical bourgeois leader intolerant of opposition but masquerading as a "liberal" and "social democrat". He could

not justify his party's collaboration with the Muslim League, of which he had been a life-long opponent. Nor could he endorse the perspective of "paralysing the work" of an administration which was part of India's national polity at the head of which he himself stood. Above all, he had no rational grounds to tell us, members of the Kerala council of ministers, that we had no right to continue. Still he told us in private that we have "managed to alienate so many people", suggesting that we could have avoided it if only we wanted. In public he declared that he was highly impressed by the big "mass upsurge" against our party and its government. As a way out of the stiuation, in which the people of the state had been ranged against one another in two hostile camps, he suggested fresh elections to the legislature.

We rejected this "way out" because nobody, not even the Prime Minister, could demand the elected government of a state to subject itself to a fresh election during the five-year term of its office so long as it had a majority in the legislature. His proposal concerning fresh election meant nothing less than a demand that we quit office, even though we continued to enjoy the confidence of a majority in the legislature. In the end, of course, he had his way : as advised by his government, the President dismissed our government and ordered fresh elections. This action revealed the real intention behind his "advice" that we quit "on our own" : it would have saved him from the odium of dismissing an elected state government which continued to have a majority in the legislature.

Let it be noted here that the "mass upsurge" which Nehru talked about at the time, was not the anti-imperialist, radical upsurge at the head of which he had stood two and a half decades ago—which was directed as much against the forces of internal reaction as against British imperialism. Those very forces of internal reaction against which he had led us, the young Congressmen of those days, were now ranged against us and behind him. Whom, after all, had we "managed to alienate" as he told us in private ? The landlords who were up in arms against our Agrarian Relations Bill. The individual and corporate managements of private educational institutions who were being obliged to adhere to certain norms, instead of

acting arbitrarily in the appointment and dismissal of teachers and other employees, etc. The rural and urban gentry who could no more take it for granted that the police force would be at their beck and call, to be used to curb the legitimate activities of workers and peasants. The better-off sections in the urban and rural society who found to their dismay that members of the "lower order" were being treated by the new administration as equals rather than with contempt as earlier. This is the crowd that rallied behind the Congress and created the "mass upsurge" of which Nehru was highly appreciative.

The real character of this "mass upsurge" became clear within a few weeks after our ministry was dismissed. In contrast to the 1930s when Nehru was campaigning against imperialism and internal reaction, and stood at the head of all the radical forces in the country, he was now out to "defeat the communists" in alliance with all forces of internal reaction. Only a couple of years ago, during the 1952 elections, he had called the Muslim League a "dead horse"; he was today riding that very "horse" to defeat the communists. Other "horses" he was now riding were the Christian churches, the Nair and other caste organisations championing the "interests" of this or that caste. Nehru, the-radical of-three decades ago, would not have touched any one of them with a barge pole, but Nehru, the-Prime Minister had to rally all of them behind his party to guarantee that the accursed communists who had earlier been thrown out through the "liberation struggle", did not come back through the mid-term elections. The leader of the class to whose hands power was transferred 12 years ago, had no other aim in life than the perpetuation of the rule of his class, "saving" the country from the terrible prospect of his adversary —the working class and its Party—acquiring a part of the administration in a small part of the country where he was the overlord.

The emergence, the 28-month-long existence and the final dismissal of the communist government of Kerala was, in other words, indicative of the sharpened struggle of the two classes contending for power, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, rather than the opening of a new "Kerala path", the path of "one state after another and finally the centre falling into the

lap of the proletariat" through "peaceful parliamentary struggle". If the "experiment" in Kerala showed anything, it is this : the struggle on the parliamentary arena, including the formation of state governments when a majority is secured, is one specific form of class struggle in which the struggle on the parliamentary arena would have to be subordinated to, though being integrated with, the extra-parliamentary struggle.

At the very time the bourgeoisie was thus busy sharpening its weapons against the Kerala government, the Fifth Congress of the Party was held at Amritsar in Punjab. Together with the Political Resolution which spelt out the Party line on current tactics, the Congress adopted two documents which were hailed in non-Party circles as containing a new perspective for the Party and the left movement in the country.

One was the addition of a new preamble to the Party Constitution which declared that the Party would strive to attain its objective through peaceful means. This was laid down in the documents of the Twentieth CPSU Congress. As a matter of fact, this need not have conveyed the meaning attributed to it. For, Marxism-Leninism does not rule out the peaceful transformation; it does not obligate the revolutionaries to eschew peaceful means whenever they are available. The question is if the correlation of class forces at the given moment internationally and nationally warrants optimism about the possibility of peaceful path being on the agenda. This, in fact, was made clear when, having completed the prolonged inner-Party discussion, the CPI(M) prepared its Programme in 1964

Secondly, the Party Constitution as amended at the Congress created an organisational structure which made it appear as if the Party was being turned into a machine for running elections and carrying on other "legal and constitutional" activities. Compactly organised "cells" at the primary level were replaced by larger branches, while at the top the two-tier C.C. and P.B. were replaced by the three-tier National Council, Central Executive and the Secretariat. At the state, district and local levels, too, the two-tier set-up was replaced by a three-tier one. Together with the rapid expansion of Party membership, these changes in the organisational structure made the Party look

like any other party the in country, engaged in the same type of legal-constitutional activities. The image of the "Party of a special type", its members being "men and women of a special mould" was being eroded.

It is not suggested here that every change in the organisational structure brought about at the Fifth Congress was wrong. A Party that had become the major opposition group in Parliament and in a few states, and was rapidly expanding in several states, had to so reorientate its activities and organisational structure as to make it possible to discharge its responsibilities as the major force of revolutionary opposition to the State and government of the bourgeoisie and landlords. As the CPI (M) pointed out subsequently, the Party should undoubtedly develop into *a mass party but not an ordinary mass party but a mass revolutionary party of the working class, with equal emphasis on mass, revolutionary and working class.*

Both the preamble to the constitution and the organisational structure as amended at the Fifth Congress, therefore, were necessary but contained elements which, while not being incorrect by themselves, were capable of being used to transform the Party into a social democratic organisation. In later years, in fact, the Amritsar amendments were misused for this very purpose. The picture presented was that, in the background of the line given at the Twentieth CPSU Congress and of the developments in Kerala, the Party was giving up its "earlier perspective of revolutionary advance" and moving along the peaceful path of parliamentarism; out of this new perspective, it was assumed, came the new organisational structure which was more in tune with an ordinary political party engaged in electioneering and other legal-constitutional activities.

Not only the non-Party masses but even large numbers within the Party were influenced by these ideas. It should, in this connection, be recalled that during the bitter inner-Party struggles of 1948-51, revisionism and right-opportunism had swayed a big section within the Party and that it was the CPSU's intervention that had then unified the Party on the basis of the 1951 documents. Now that the CPSU itself was adopting a new ideological-political and organisational line which could be interpreted in a revisionist way, our own

revisionists were greatly encouraged to resume their fight. Furthermore, as was seen at the Fourth Congress, the balance of forces within the Party was extremely delicate. The slightest shift in the inner-Party balance could upset it, as it was actually upset later.

At the moment, however, the entire Party was engaged in a bitter struggle against the Congress party and its Central Government who were out to destabilise and topple the Kerala government; the very government whose coming into existence and functioning for two years had raised the illusion concerning "Kerala today, more states tomorrow, finally the centre", was sought to be thrown out. Those who nurtured the illusion, as well as those who fought them, had, therefore, to unite and fight back this offensive. The culmination of this bitter battle—the dismissal of the Kerala government—further underlined the need for a united fight against the Congress and its Central Government. The gulf that divided the Party on ideological grounds, therefore, receded into the background, for the time being, of course.

As the dismissed Chief Minister of the only state government formed by the Communist Party, I happened to be the central figure in the bitter battles which overshadowed the ideological, political and organisational questions posed at the Amritsar Congress and on which there were serious differences in the Party. During the weeks of "liberation struggle" in Kerala as well as after the dismissal of our government, therefore, I had to be one of the spokesmen of the Party. The Party meanwhile, decided that I should undertake an all-India tour which I carried out in two months. This was the first time I was addressing big crowds all over the country—and on a question in which the people all over the country were interested—the future of parliamentary democracy in India. That question happened to be one in which Party members were interested in particular since at that time the newly added preamble to the Party constitution, envisaging peaceful transition in India, was being publicly debated

My speeches in all the meetings emphasised two points : Firstly, our government in Kerala did nothing more than carry out policies which the entire radical democratic movement,

including the Congress, was committed to; the dismissal of that government was, therefore, directed not against a particular party but against the entire democratic movement. Secondly, the intolerance shown towards our government would not be confined to us; it would extend itself to any other non-Congress party which secures a majority and forms government in some or other state.

I, therefore, called upon all those who valued parliamentary democracy and the federal polity to join us communists in resisting this authoritarian move. Drawing a parallel with the developments in Pakistan, I pointed out how the dismissal of the elected government in East Pakistan by the Central Government was the beginning of a process through which the parliamentary democratic system in that country was subverted and military regime established. This, I cautioned, would be the fate of our country unless the beginnings made in Kerala were reversed through the united will and action of the Indian people.

While this created lots of sympathy and understanding for us all over the country, something happened in the meanwhile to arrest the process and create a sense of hostility towards the Party among the people at large. The reference is to the India-China conflict on the border question. National feelings were roused against the Chinese and sought to be cleverly directed against the Communist Party of India. I was myself confronted with demonstrations at the meetings held to give reception to me all over the country. Pressmen plied me with questions which I had to answer. The situation was so serious that an emergency meeting of the National Council had to be held at Meerut to define the Party's approach to the China question.

The meeting was held in a tense atmosphere. Many comrades were swayed by national sentiments and had started adopting anti-China positions. The majority, however, wanted to express itself on a low key. Different drafts were prepared, amendments moved to them and, through the process of eliminations and additions, a final text emerged as the official view of the Party. That, however, was too soft for the anti-China lobby in the country, culminating in denunciation of the entire Party as "pro-China"—an exact parallel to the

"pro-Russia" allegation to which the Party had earlier been victim.

Though the whole Party was thus denounced as "pro-China", the bourgeois press had started noting shades of differences among Party leaders. Half-truths and even untruths concerning individual leaders adopting this or that position, appeared in news despatches. They however, did not negate the fact that while there were shades of differences among leaders, the Party was by and large unified on the position that the India-China border disputes were of such a nature as could be settled through negotiations.

Relevant in this context is the fact that while Sino-Indian relations had deteriorated, tensions between the USSR and China, and tension within the international movement, had not come into the open. There was thus no possibility of discovering differences between "pro-Russia" and "pro-China" groups in the CPI. This was a subsequent development. It was the CPI as a whole, rather than a particular group within it, that was denounced as "pro-China".

This had its repercussions in the mid-term elections in Kerala, held within three months of the Meerut meeting of the CPI National Council. For, it gave tongue to the hysterical anti-communists who were, even otherwise, powerful. Ranged against the Party was a united anti-communist front headed by the premier national organisation and joined by all caste and communal organisations in the state. Furthermore, all the non-communist left parties and organisations in the state—the RSP, the KSP and the PSP—were on the other side; the last two were actual constituents of the anti-communist front while the RSP helped that front by playing an "independent" role. It was to this formidable combination of political-electoral adversaries that was added a big political factor against the CPI—the national sentiment on the question of border dispute with China.

It goes to the credit of the Party that, braving all odds and with virtually no allies, it secured 40% of the votes polled on its own, while the votes polled by a few allies came to 4%. The reason is that, during the 28 months of its existence, the government was seen by the people as a real representative of all that

was valuable in the national tradition. The people were, therefore, indignant that such a government was toppled by those who claimed to be inheritors of the great national organisation which stood at the head of the freedom struggle. However, the fate that overtook that government in 1959-60, followed by the subsequent struggles in Kerala itself and in other states like West Bengal, showed that the formula "Kerala today, other states tomorrow and finally the centre" was completely unrealistic, though the struggle for the formation of such governments in states and their defence against toppling games on the Kerala "liberation struggle" model is an integral part of class struggle in our country.

CHAPTER 26

THE GREAT DIVIDE

WHEN THE INDIA-CHINA BORDER CLASHES BROKE out, there was no divison in the international movement. The Sino-Soviet differences had not come into the open. It, however, did not take long for these differences to become public.

The first public declaration of these differences was made in April 1960, wihin a year after the first clashes on the Sino-Indian border took place. It came by way of a long article under the title, *Long Live Leninism*, published in the theoretical journal of the Communist Party of China. Brought out on the occasion of Lenin's birthday, it restated the major postulates of Leninism and made a scarcely veiled attack on "modern revisionism" which characterised the new line expounded by the CPSU leadership at their Twentieth Congress. It created big news in the world capitalist press and was duly utilised by the anti-communists throughout the world.

In India, the bourgeoisie whose mouthpieces had started an anti-China tirade on the border clashes, could well use the division in the international movement to mount further attacks on the CPI. Within the CPI itself, those who wanted to go wholehog with the bourgeoisie in the anti-China tirade on the issue of border clashes, saw in the open revelation of differences between the CPSU and the CPC an opportunity to break out of the restraint observed by the Party in the criticism of the CPC on the border question.

Like many comrades in India and abroad, I had been unhappy at some aspects of the developing situation in the

international movement beginning with the Twentieth CPSU Congress. I, however, did not have a clear idea of the type of the struggle that would start or its intensity. Serious reservations on the new concepts of the three "peacefuls"—co-existence, competition and transformation—particularly the last; unconcealed differences on the form, method and content of the critique of Stalin's personality; unhappiness over the socialist leaders' approach to and assessment of the ruling classes in our country—these were the limits to my understanding of our differences with the fraternal parties. On this, however, the Soviet and Chinese Parties did not hold divergent views.

It was, therefore, something of a shock to me to find the apellation "modern revisionism" being used by the CPC against the CPSU. When I attended the Eighth Congress of the Chinese Party which came after the Soviet Party's Twentieth Congress, the Chinese comrades had extended their support to the CPSU on its new line. Later on, when I attended the Twenty-first Congress of the CPSU, I found support being extended to the Chinese for some of the "novel and original" ways adopted by the Chinese comrades in socialist construction. There was thus no inkling of the storms that were then brewing and swept the world communist movement after the Chinese Party's article on Leninism.

Looking back into the Congresses of the two fraternal parties held in 1956 and 1959, I can now see that the international movement had entered a phase of acute crisis—a reality which, in my innocence, I could not see or fathom. Revisionism/right-opportunism and dogmatism/left-opportunism—the twin evils which had done havoc to our Party—had started corroding all fraternal parties, the most experienced of them being no exception. This, in a way, had been noted by the Soviet and Chinese Parties themselves along with others in the 1957 Moscow *Declaration* and reiterated in the Moscow *Statement* of 81 fraternal parties in November 1960. Four years later, in 1964, when we of the then left in the CPI formed ourselves into the CPI (M) with our own Programme, the Soviet and Chinese Parties had by then entered on a public debate reminiscent of the pro-and anti-Yugoslav polemics earlier. In 1964 we

pledged ourselves to work for the reunification of the world communist movement on the basis of a struggle against the twin evils.

The public debate that started with the publication of the article *Long Live Leninism* created great tension in the international movement. The occasion of the Rumanian Party Congress in Bucharest was used for an "informal" but acrimonious exchange of words, to which Bhupesh Gupta and Basavapunnaiah from our Party were witnesses. The exchange did not settle anything. It was, therefore, decided to hold a world conference of fraternal parties to which the CPI was invited—not only to join the plenary session of the conference itself, but to be a member of the editorial or preparatory committee.

A meeting of our Central Executive was called to discuss the line to be adopted at the Moscow conference and to select the delegates who will attend the conference. Sharp differences had, in the meanwhile, been revealed among the Executive members, both on international and national questions. Not only had these to be ironed out and the guidelines for the delegation drawn but a list prepared of delegates who will represent the various ideological-political trends in the executive. It was a difficult task indeed, but was discharged with a measure of satisfaction to everyoody in the executive. The five-member delegation chosen to represent our Party was to be led by the General Secretary, Ajoy Ghosh, and included me, the other three being Dange, Ramamurti and Bhupesh Gupta.

The conference lasted for three weeks. Formal speeches by heads of delegations expounding the views of the respective parties went on side by side with the sittings of an editorial commission hammering out a joint statement to be adopted at the end. Our delegation's speech was read out by the General Secretary, Ajoy Ghosh, while Bhupesh worked on the commission. The statement was a comprehensive document dealing with the major problems facing the international movement. Issued at the end of the conference as expressive of the unanimous views of all the participants at the conference, the statement gave temporary satisfaction to all of us.

However, even before the ink had dried on the printed sheets, differences cropped up on the content of the document.

This was, at the international level, revealed in the open letters exchanged between the Soviet and Chinese Parties. Nationally, it expressed itself in the fact that the five-member delegation returning from Moscow could not present a unanimous report to the National Council. (The oral observations I made at the Council meeting expressed my view that the stand adopted by the Soviet delegation was capable of being stretched along revisionist lines, though I could not support the sharp criticism made in the Chinese documents). Together with differences on the assessment of the internal (economic and political) situation, this culminated in the preparation of different documents to be presented at the Sixth CPI Congress held at Vijayawada in April 1961.

The serious differences that had cropped up at the Fourth Congress in 1956 (immediately after the Twentieth CPSU Congress) had made it clear that the Party Programme adopted in 1951 had become outmoded and had, therefore, to be redrafted. There was, however, no common understanding on the lines along which the redrafting was to be done. The National Council itself having no common understanding, it was decided that comrades holding different views would present their respective drafts. The Sixth Congress, therefore, had two drafts before it, characterised respectively as "rightist" and "leftist"—the former having S.A. Dange, P.C. Joshi and G. Adhikari as signatories and supported by C. Rajeswara Rao and others, while the latter was moved by 21 members of the National Council—they were : Abdul Halim, Achintya Bhattacharya, Bhupesh Gupta, Biren Dutta, B.T. Ranadive, Dasarath Deb, D. Venkateswara Rao, E.K. Imbichibava, Guntur Bapanayya, Harekrishna Konar, Hari Singh, Harkishan Singh Surjeet, Jagjit Singh Lyalpuri, Jyoti Basu, M. Basavapunnaiah, M. Hanumantha Rao, Muzaffar Ahmed, N. Prasad Rao, P. Sundarayya, Sohan Singh Josh and T. Nagi Reddy. Having differences with both, I had my own separate draft which, along with the other two, was made available to the Sixth Congress delegates.

The differences were, however, not confined to programmatic positions. They concerned questions of assessing the current situation and working out the tactical line so that there was no

common understanding on the Political Resolution to be adopted by the Congress. While the discussions on and the adoption of the new Programme could be deferred, the Congress could not disperse without having a unanimous or majority document spelling out the Party's current tactics. This requirement of the Party Congress was met by the strange procedure of incorporating many passages from the General Secretary's speech (on which there was broad agreement) in place of the passages in the draft resolution to which there were objections.

This was an obvious compromise to stave off a crisis. A similar compromise had to be arrived at on the organisational set-up—the number and names of comrades to be included in the new National Council. It was after prolonged night-long haggling that a panel of 120 names for the Council was adopted.

It was, however, obvious that the entire session was a holding operation: the political line adopted and the leadership elected hardly represented that unity of will and action which is required of a genuinely revolutionary party of the working class. The main task to be discharged by the Party leadership—outlining the strategy and tactics of the working class in Indian revolution—remained

This was, of course, not a particular failing of the CPI alone. The entire international movement, the CPSU and the CPC included, had failed to evolve the correct line for the international movement and for themselves. Instead of basing themselves on and further developing the consensus arrived at in the *Statement* of the 81 parties' conference in Moscow (1960), they carried on their public debate, trying to involve other parties or factional groupings within parties. Our own Party was involved in the process, making it possible for anti-communists to dub some of us as "pro-China" and others as "pro-Russia"

To our misfortune, those of us in CPI who differed seriously with the CPSU assessment of the situation in India (which, by the way, was also the assessment of the Chinese Party up to 1959) and had reservations on the CPSU estimate of the world situation, were put in the category of "pro-China". It did not matter to our critics that we could not endorse the stand

adopted by the Chinese Party ; it was enough for them that we were not cent per cent with the CPSU. Those who were not with CPSU were necessarily with the CPC—this was the simplistic understanding that prevailed ; and we were judged accordingly.

The inner-Party situation after the Sixth Congress was therefore, marked by a deep division from top to bottom. The two clearly demarcated groups, as well as many like me who could not go wholehog along with either, were marking time on the basis of the patch-up solution found at the Sixth Congress both on the political and organisational questions. While this could not obviously continue, an open break being inevitable in the future, nobody wanted to take the responsibility for it taking place now.

It was in this situation that, in early 1962, the General Secretary, Ajoy Ghosh, died, which raised the question: Who after Ghosh ? Names that were suggested from one side would be objected to from the other. I was approached to take over. I was reluctant because temperamentally I am unfit to be in a position of responsibility unless I get the full support of my comrades. I was not sure of this support when the Party was so divided from top to bottom that I could not go fully along with either of the two powerful ideological-political trends entrenched in the Party. In the end, however, I agreed provided I was unanimously elected. The "right" added their own proviso : in place of the General Secretary being the sole functionary of the Party, a new post of Chairman must be created with whom I would have to work as the General Secretary. This had, in the end, to be agreed to, and the "unanimous election" of Dange as Chairman and me as General Secretary apparently broke the deadlock.

Like the earlier Vijayawada Congress, this resolution of the deadlock proved to be only a temporary one. The patch-up arrangement of balancing between the "left" and the "right", with an avowed "rightist" as Chairman and a "pro-left", as General Secretary, did not last more than a few months. I, who took over as General Secretary in May 1962, had to tender my resignation in February 1963 after months of tension which was inherent in the very nature of the patch-up. Why, then,

was the patch-up made to begin with, and why could it not endure ?

To answer these questions, we should go back to the first confrontation between the two ideological-political trends in the Party—at the Fourth Congress held in 1956. The issue posed then was simple and straight : Should the Party play the role of opposition to the bourgeois-landlord rule symbolised by the Congress party and its government, or should it work towards such an "all-in unity" as would extend from communists to Congress, ultimately leading to "the formation of a coalition government ? The majority plumped for the former and against the latter.

The developments that followed the Fourth Congress and the toppling of the Kerala government almost coincided with a parallel development, internationally and nationally, which brought forward "the China factor". As opposed to the growing discontent against the Congress government's policies and practices within the country was the indignation at the Chinese actions on the Indian border, still further intensified by the rift in the international communist movement. The operation of these two factors upset the earlier balance of forces in the Party with the majority against the "right" ; the anti-China stance adopted by the "right" helped to divert the issue from the class political position of opposition to the ruling classes and their government in the country to the national issue of the "external" danger. While this strengthened the "right" and weakened the "left" in the Party, the latter was still powerful. This new balance—the two being almost equal—was reflected in the bitter battle that ended in a stalemate at the Sixth Congress. The result was the patch-up made at the Congress, which was repeated at the May 1962 meeting of the National Council.

Could this have continued for long ? One cannot give a categorical answer. Only one thing is indisputable : the "China question" was going from bad to worse. Not only were border clashes continuing, on which there were divergences in the public pronouncements made by the Chairman and General Secretary of the Party (Dange and myself respectively), but the Chinese made further advances all along the border. Feelings

were roused not only against the Chinese but also against the "pro-China" elements in the Party. A section in the leadership, led by Chairman Dange himself, went full scale in denouncing the "Chinese aggressor", as well as denouncing as "Chinese agents" all those who failed to fall in line with his anti-China campaign.

The emergency meeting of the National Council held to consider this situation, proved to be the beginning of the end of the patch-up solution worked out at the May 1962 meeting of the National Council. Those of us who had reservations on the draft formally moved by the majority, expressed ourselves and voted against it. When it was finally adopted, the "left" resigned their posts, while I who was pro-left agreed to continue after making my position clear against the majority view. This was followed by the wholesale arrest of "pro-China" elements in the CPI while the "patriotic" elements were given full freedom. I myself was arrested in the central office but, unlike other comrades, I was released after a week.

I should record here the information I received subsequently about my arrest and release : in originally arresting us all, the authorities were not scrupulous to find out who were actually "pro-China". Many who were as "anti-China" as those who were left free were, in fact, arrested. I was, therefore, not surprised at my arrest because I was in fact "pro-China" in two senses. Firstly, while I was critical of the Chinese approaches and actions on the border, I disagreed with the view that the dispute could be settled through military means ; I refused to be swayed by the anti-China hysteria which had seized the bulk of the people, including Party members. Secondly, while I had reservations on the Chinese stand on several international questions, I was not with the Soviets on several questions ; I was thus "pro-China" if that term meant having differences with the Soviets.

The reason for my release was not that the authorities made a thorough enquiry and found that I had been wrongly arrested. The reason simply was that Dange, as the Chairman of the Party, wanted to go abroad and explain to foreign comrades the anti-China and pro-government position adopted by the Party. The government was fully appreciative of the need for

this and wanted to give him all facilities to carry out the mission. He, however, put the question: "How can I go abroad with my General Secretary in jail ?" I was thus released to remain as his "dummy General Secretary"—the very term Dange used in a P.B. meeting to describe me.

The few weeks between my release and the acceptance of my resignation was, in fact, a period when Dange as Chairman and his rightist colleagues treated me as "dummy General Secretary", a virtual prisoner held by them. I had to fix my signature to a letter to brother parties explaining the decision of the National Council on the "Chinese aggression", with which I was basically in disagreement. The editorial I wrote for the Party Organ demanding the release of arrested comrades was not allowed to be published because it was allegedly opposed to the resolution adopted by the National Council. Though in theory I was the head of the Central office as General Secretary, I was made to feel that I had no rights except to be a "dummy", as Dange described me. I was reduced to a position when I had to fight back.

CHAPTER 27

AGAINST REVISIONISM AND SECTARIANISM

ALONG WITH MY LETTER OF RESIGNATION, I submitted a note spelling out my differences with the majority in the then National Council, the Central Executive and the Secretariat. Entitled *Revisionism and Dogmatism in the CPI*, it expressed concern over the current internal situation in the Party, within the leadership in particular. I said that the Party was fast going along the path of disruption. While dealing specifically with the political and organisational line adopted by the majority since the outbreak of the crisis on the China question, I went on to trace the history of, and draw lessons from, the earlier inner-party struggles. I was guided by the 1960 *Statement* of the international movement which called revisionism as the main danger, while on occasions sectarianism might also crop up in some parties.

This was the logical development of the role I played at the Sixth Congress where I had my own draft along with the two other drafts from the 'right' and the 'left'. Up till then, I was either a follower of P.C. Joshi (till the Second Congress), with Ranadive (1948-50), Rajeswara Rao (1950-51) or Ajoy Ghosh (since 1951), though I had reservations on the lines adopted by the last three. Since 1956 (the Twentieth CPSU Congress) and, subsequently, with the hotting up of the China question (in its international and national aspects), I started drifting away from Ajoy Ghosh. My views on the Soviet position at the 81 Parties' Conference in Moscow (which I shared

with the National Council) was divergent from that of Ghosh; so was my approach to the question of India-China border and the outbreak of conflict over it. My position was at the same time divergent from that of comrades who were known as 'leftists'. I was thus considered (not incorrectly) as a 'centrist' like Ghosh but slowly demarcating myself from him. Hence the decision of the left to propose my name after Ghosh's expiry in his place, and also the rightists' proviso to have Dange as Chairman as a counter-weight against me.

The failure of the 1962 'experiment'—a 'composite leadership' in which I was supposed to play a key role—took me to a position which was far from that of the 'right' but was still no nearer the 'leftists'. I was completely opposed to the rightists on the national plane which to me appeared to be that of "Congress-communist unity" advocated by them in 1956. I, however, could not reconcile myself to the leftist positions on some aspects of the national situation. At the international level, I had serious reservations on the position adopted by the CPSU but my reservations on the Chinese positions were no less. The confusion arising out of this was evident from the note I submitted to the National Council (which was printed and circulated at my request). While it did play some role in the development of my political thought (and may therefore still be of some value for students of Party history), I did not adhere for long to the position spelt out in that document in several respects.

That document, however, was only the beginning of my self-education in preparation for the serious inner-party struggle that I saw ahead. Being no more the General Secretary of the Party and not burdened with any organisational tasks in my home state (except as leader of opposition in the Kerala state legislature), I had plenty of time which I decided to use for some basic study which would help in my participation in the inner-party struggle. This led me to the preparation of a major work under the title *Economics and Politics of India's Socialist Pattern*. Beginning with a short history of the economic and political thought of the Indian bourgeoisie in the pre-independence decades, the book made a critique of the post-independence measures of the Congress and its government—

economic, political and socio-cultural.

Like the earlier note on *Revisionism and Dogmatism in the CPI*, the writing of this volume was a step in the process of my self-education. Though the writing of the book was complete before the 1964 split of the Party, it was published only in 1966. Conscious of the limitations of such a work, I declined all subsequent offers to bring out a second edition, though I used the material contained in it for two slim volumes—one on post-independence economy, *Indian Planning in Crisis* and another on politics since independence, *Crisis into Chaos*.

Work on this book and the earlier note to the Party on the two deviations, helped me to come to definite conclusions on the programme to be drafted for the Party. By that time, however, the crisis in the Party had gone far deeper, making it more and more clear that the Party was moving towards a split. As things then stood, it was clear it would not be possible for me to go with either of the two entities into which the Party would be split. It was, therefore, necessary for me to be clear on where I stood, so that those with whom I would have to work under the new circumstances, might have no misunderstandings about my position.

I had, in the meanwhile, received an offer from the Soviet comrades to have, with my wife a two-month holiday in the USSR. This was welcome for two reasons : in the then state of my wife's health, it would do her good; secondly, while I too had some problems of health, I required a lot of time to think, study and discuss with comrades who would be available in Moscow. There was, however, the initial obstacle that our application for clearance from the Reserve Bank was rejected. We, therefore, went back to Kerala after remaining in Delhi for several days. Only after this obstacle was removed, thanks to intervention by friends, could we proceed. My objectives of going abroad were by and large attained.

Although I had earlier visited the Soviet Union twice, spending a few weeks every time in 1959 and 1960, I had confined myself on both occasions most of the time to Moscow. A couple of days in Tashkent and Leningrad both times was all that I had seen of the USSR outside Moscow. Now however I was visiting several Union Republics—Ukraine, Georgia,

Azerbaijan—as well as more places in the Russian Republic itself. I went to factories, power projects, State and collective farms, universities and so on. While, during my earlier visits too, I had witnessed such cultural performances as ballets, cinemas, sports and games, etc., in Moscow, I now had the opportunity to see them outside Moscow. A few days' stay in a sanatorium also helped my wife and myself to improve our health. Our guide and interpreter—Igor Serebriakov, a former Pravda correspondent at Madras—helped us a lot since he could talk to my wife in Hindi, explain to me the content of some Indologists' works in Russian and otherwise make our stay and visit pleasant and useful.

In Moscow itself, I could meet a large number of academicians, many of them Indologists, with whom I could exchange views on several problems—international and Indian. At the Party political level, apart from the comrades of the CPSU's international department who were in charge of us, I had a discussion with Ponomarov, the deputy head of the international department of the CPSU (the head of the department, Suslov, was in the hospital) and had frank exchanges. It was obvious that the sympathies of the CPSU were with the rightists and against us.

One of the foreign comrades I met in Moscow was the Indonesian Party's General Secretary, Aidit, who, like me, was on a holiday in the USSR. He explained to me the stand adopted by his Party on international questions as well as in Indonesian politics. I can never forget that meeting since, in about two years, Aidit, along with several hundreds of Indonesian comrades, was brutally assassinated by the reactionaries—a tragic chapter in the history of not only the Indonesian Party but of the world communist movement.

Even before I left for the Soviet Union, the rightists in the Party leadership (who had a slender majority in the central leadership) had launched a vicious offensive against the left. The Central Control Commission was enquiring into charges of "clandestine activities against the leadership" indulged in by some comrades, including A.K. Gopalan in Kerala. Within a few days after my return, the report of the Commission was presented to the National Council which, as recommended by

the Commission, censured Gopalan. It was clear that, instead of carrying on an honest and straight-forward struggle on the ideological and political issues posed before the Party, the rightists in the leadership were preparing themselves to 'discipline' the left through organisational measures. I could see, even when I was in Moscow, that this was the direction in which they were moving. I was of the view that this would do serious damage to the Party. The comrades in Moscow with whom I could share this apprehension were of little help since they could not concern themselves with the purely internal affairs of the Party.

It was, in the meanwhile, revealed that the National Archives in Delhi had in its files relating to the early-1920s, the copy of a letter allegedly written from jail by S.A. Dange to the British authorities which, if it were genuine, would demolish his image as a leader of the revolutionary movement in the country. Those who knew him would not dismiss the probability of such a letter having been written by him, but wanted to make sure. Several comrades went to the Archives to examine the file. I myself did not go since I considered it more important that a commission of the National Council go and examine the record, rather than individual comrades doing it on their own. (For myself, it was enough that many other comrades had seen the file.) It all appeared extremely suspicious when Dange objected to any Party commission going to examine the concerned file. This naturally became an issue which took the inner-Party struggle position to the breaking point.

It was, therefore, in a surcharged atmosphere that a National Council meeting was held in April 1964. We of the left proposed that the "Dange letter" be put on the agenda; also that when that question was being considered by the Council, Dange must not occupy the chair. When these proposals were rejected, 32 of us—more than 25 per cent of the members—walked out of the meeting. Those who remained after the meeting adopted a resolution suspending all the 32 of us. The statement issued by us, and the other statement suspending us, became the opening shots of an inner-party and mass campaign which culminated in the holding of two Party Congresses, each adopting its

respective Party Programme and claiming to be the rightful inheritor of the CPI. Only one out of the 32 who walked out—Bhupesh Gupta—opted for the CPI, all the rest joining the CPI (M).

Our first job after that crucial meeting was to go to the people and explain why we had to take the step which, under normal circumstances, no communist would do. We were compelled to adopt this course because the rightists who had a temporary majority in the leadership—but not in the ranks—were trying to suppress the minority in the leadership (in reality, the majority in the Party) through arbitrary, unconstitutional methods. Even at this stage, we said, Party unity could be preserved if only it was guaranteed that the ideological and political differences in the Party would be freely discussed and a Party Congress held to clinch the issues. Certain moves were, in fact, made to bring about reconciliation between the two but were foiled because our opponents were hopeful that, with the powerful support of the CPSU abroad and of the government of India here, they would be able to beat us to pulp, reduce us to an insignificant group of "splitters"

Driven to the wall, therefore, we had to defend ourselves. My home state Kerala (the home state of Gopalan as well) was crucial, since it was one of the major centres of the Party's strength in the country. It was, therefore, decided that the two of us should jointly tour Kerala and address mass meetings as well as general body meetings of Party members and sympathisers. The first round of this programme proved successful beyond our expectations. It, however, had to be followed up. Furthermore, the struggle had to be taken to the organisational level : which committee, or rather what percentage of members in each committee, would side with the left and which with the right—this became the crucial issue. Whichever side be the winner, the other side was bound to and did organise itself as a parallel committee.

A similar struggle was going on for the possession of Party property—the offices, the newspapers and publications, presses, etc. Most of the these went to the rightists, except the *Deshabhimani* daily and the printing press which came to us. We, therefore, had to begin with almost nothing by way of

Party property, but the bulk of Party members and friends of the Party were with us.

Still another problem that faced us of the left in Kerala was that, though we were united against the right, there were differences among ourselves. Apart from the national situation on which there were differences, sharper differences existed on the international issues. It was neither possible nor useful to try to iron out these differences. We, therefore, agreed to have a minimun understanding on issues on which differences were the least. Such a consensus was worked out at a special conference or convention held at Cochin, after our walk-out from the National Council and before the Party* Congress.

This consensus, however, was different from the draft prepared by the majority of the organising committee with which I had my own differences. The majority draft, my separate note and the majority's rejoinder to my note were all circulated among the delegates who assembled for the Seventh Congress. Prolonged discussions with the other 31 (in fact, 30, since Bhupesh left us) who had walked out of the crucial National Council meeting, the Tenali meeting which decided to hold the Congress at Calcutta, and the subsequent deliberations before and at the Congress brought me closer to the rest of the organising committee. I nevertheless had to move a series of amendments to the Programme presented by the majority, some of which were accepted while many were not. It was to me a matter of satisfaction that the Political-Organisational Report assessing the current situation (in drafting which I too participated) gave a sharp warning against the sectarian danger facing the Party and called for a broad unity which would include the masses rallied behind the ruling and bourgeois opposition parties. The several resolutions adopted on various aspects of the current situation (including the one on the impending Kerala elections) further concretised the general call for broad unity.

Equally important was the fact that a clinching of two controversial questions was held over, as it required more time. The first was the persisting differences on the ideological

* From here onward the word Party, where not otherwise indicated, must mean the CPI(M)

questions being debated in the world communist movement. This meant that, there being differences, the Congress was not yet prepared to commit itself on these questions. The Congress, in other words, did not take the "pro-China" position, as our adversaries have since been accusing us of. (We could very well have adopted a resolution endorsing the Chinese position if we had in fact been "pro-China", as we were alleged to be.) There was, besides, the clear commitment made in the Party Programme to work for restoration of the world communist unity on the basis of struggle against revisionism and sectarianism.

The newly-elected General Secretary of the CPI (M), P. Sundarayya, then wrote a letter to the CPSU Central Committee explaining the circumstances in which we had to break with the revisionists in the undivided CPI. A copy of the letter was sent to all fraternal parties with the signature of Polit Bureau member M. Basavapunnaiah.

The non-adoption of a document on the ideological questions being debated in the world communist movement, the Programme commitment to work for restoration of the world communist unity, and the formal communication to the CPSU and other fraternal parties after the Seventh Congress—all these show that what emerged in India in 1964 was not a "pro-China" outfit but a Party with its independent line but not hostile to either the CPSU or the CPC.

The other question whose clinching was put off was that of nationalities. The reason was that, while there was a view (widespread in the Party) that self-determination of nationalities (including the right to secede) was obligatory for every Marxist-Leninist party, the leadership had reservations on it and wanted to hold over the discussions on and clinching of the issue for the time being. I may note here in anticipation that, when the question was, in the end, clinched in 1972, the idea of right to secede was rejected.

I was personally satisfied that the Party emerging out of the Seventh Congress was the embodiment of what I had dreamt of—a Party committed to Marxism-Leninism and fighting the two (right and left) deviations. What I had written earlier, including my note on revisionism and dogmatism, the bigger volume entiled *Economics and Politics, the Note on Programme*

etc., were exercises for the evolution of a correct Party line; each of them, therefore, contains much that had to be discarded. I gladly accepted the offer of being included not only in the C.C. but in the P.B. also. The positions jointly adopted (including the rejection of many of my amendments) were for me sufficient as a basis to work on, the rest to be left to the practical experience of implementing the line.

CHAPTER 28

PEOPLE'S DEMOCRACY VERSUS NATIONAL DEMOCRACY

THE TWO PROGRAMMES ADOPTED BY THE TWO Seventh Congresses, out of which emerged the CPI (M) and the present CPI, differed from each other in several respects. *Internationally*, the CPI (M) committed itself to the struggle for reforging the unity of the world communist movement on the basis of struggle against revisionism and sectarianism; since the CPI had no use for world communist unity it joined the chorus of anti-China hysteria, its main point against the CPI (M) being its refusal to join this chorus. *Nationally*, the CPI(M) committed itself to the struggle for People's Democracy as the central strategic objective, the same as had been accepted in the 1951 Programme; the CPI, on the other hand, abandoned People's Democracy in favour of National Democracy.

Looking back at the developments of the last 22 years, it is now clear that the latter question was put to the test immediately. Beginning with Kerala in 1965 and Indian politics in 1967-69, the CPI, with its strategic slogan of National Democracy, pursued the tactics of collaboration with bourgeois parties, while the CPI(M), with its strategy of People's Democracy, adopted the proletarian tactics of using the differences among the bourgeois parties for strengthening the Party and its allies. Since this was put to the test in Kerala, to begin with, and then extended to all-India politics, let us now turn to these developments.

Since the beginning of the 1960s, the Congress leadership

had adopted a new political-tactical line to 'contain' the threat it was facing in Kerala—the threat of communism. No more did it consider itself strong enough in this small state to form its single-party government. It was prepared to ally itself with two other parties, one of which, incidentally, is a separatist organisation of a particular religious community, viz. Muslim. That, in fact, was the beginning of a process through which the Congress became the unscrupulous partner of alliances in which divisive and separatist forces of all kinds played decisive roles.

The anti-communist unity forged in Kerala was of immediate benefit to the three partners as well as others who, without being direct participants, did help in knocking it together. The Congress emerged as the effective political leader of the new ruling coalition. The PSP, though much smaller, had the satisfaction of its leader heading the government; the leader of the Congress Legislature Party was content with the post of Deputy Chief Minister. The Muslim League too had the consolation of being included in the United Front Legislature Party—a clear recognition of equality with the other two direct participants of the anti-communist governmental coalition. The two "non-political" foster-parents of the new coalition—the Christian churches and the Nair Service Society—were sure that, beholden as the new ruling coalition was to them, they could do "backseat driving". The leaders of the backward Hindu castes (particularly the Ezhavas) were happy that the sponsor of the move to "adulterate caste-based reservation", i.e. the (united) CPI, was kept out of the state administration.

But hardly had the elections been over, it became clear that the anti-communist coalition had within it the seeds of its future collapse. The Congress high command which had blessed the electoral alliance that helped the Congress to secure almost a single-party majority in the Assembly, could not treat the Muslim League as a coalition partner with a seat in the ministry; the limit of League participation was the Assembly Speaker's post for its leader. Although angry beyond description, the League had to swallow the humiliation. A wave of hostility to the Congress began to sweep the mass of League members and followers.

The other coalition partner, the PSP, had no room for complaint, its leader being the Chief Minister. Its relations with the senior partner however, were getting more and more strained because Congressmen were resentful at the domination of a party which was far weaker than theirs. Apart from the Chief Minister at the top, his partymen at all levels tried to adopt domineering positions. Things became all the more confused because the Chief Minister's "mass base" was a particular caste (the Nayar) in a particular area (Trivandrum), while the Congress had its supporters in all castes and areas. The growing alienation of the two parties led, in the end, to the Central Government using its authority to "promote" the Chief Minister as the Governor of Punjab, so that the leader of the Congress party in the legislature could be raised from Deputy Chief Minister to Chief Minister. Since this was done behind the back of the PSP in Kerala, the latter expressed its protest by withdrawing from the ruling coalition.

In the meanwhile, the Muslim League was faced with a still more difficult choice. The Speaker who was elected in the beginning died, raising the question of his successor. The League staked its claim, nominating its legislature party leader for it. The Congress agreed but on one condition : since the Speaker is to be a "non-party man", the present incumbent should resign his party membership before being nominated. Although it was unprecedented in constitutional history (no Speaker so far, anywhere in India, including the deceased League Speaker, was asked to resign from the party) the League pocketed the insult : its candidate for the Speaker's post did resign from his party. The withdrawal of the PSP from the coalition gave courage to the League leaders to follow suit; their legislature party group, including the newly-elected Speaker, moved from the treasury to the opposition benches.

As leader of the opposition in the Legislative Assembly, I was using the floor of the Assembly to expose the policies of the treasury benches, including the policies of the Muslim League and the PSP. As a party of proletarian opposition, however, we integrated our parliamentary and extra-parliamentary activities. Opposition to the Central Government's directives concerning the 1957-59 legislation on agrarian

reforms and education, demands on the centre for development projects for Kerala, resistance to evictions of peasants from the hills, etc., became issues for militant agitations and actions outside, which were echoed inside the Assembly. Lakhs of people following the Congress (including the Christian masses, hitherto the bastion of anti-communism) were drawn into common action. Along with A.K. Gopalan who raised all these issues in the Lok Sabha and other forums of all-India agitation, I became one of the main campaigners outside the legislature, while our legislators, including me, echoed them inside the house.

Special mention should be made of the agitation that developed on the eviction of peasants from the hilly areas of what subsequently became Idukki district. Since the majority of the evicted persons were Christians, there was plenty of sympathy for them among the leaders and activists of the anti-communist front whose acknowledged mass leader joined us in the agitation.

It was against this background that A.K. Gopalan went on a hunger-strike against the eviction. The issue raised by him was, in the end, settled, the Congress Minister for Home and Land Revenue, on the one side, and myself on the other, being signatories to a document on the basis of which Gopalan called off the hunger-strike.

This being the process through which tens of thousands of those, who were so far anti-communists, had their eyes opened, the political situation in the state changed to a remarkable extent : Within the Congress which had become the single ruling party in the state, the earlier hostility towards the communists got weakened, many Congress leaders being now prepared to work with the communists. A big section of them being Christians, the mass base of the Congress started eroding. Together with the caste-based rivalry between Christian and non-Christian Congressmen, this prepared the ground for the first split in the Congress which culminated in the emergence of what was at the time known as the "rebel Congress", subsequently rechristened as the Kerala Congress. Over a dozen Congressmen belonging to this group voted with the opposition (whose ranks had, in the meanwhile, been joined by the Musim

League and the PSP) to get a no-confidence motion passed in the Assembly. That was the end of the anti-communist united front which was formed in 1959-60 and remained in the Ministry for four and a half years.

The CPI had, in the meanwhile, been split. The right in the Party having a slight edge over us, I ceased to be the opposition leader, Achutha Menon taking my place. The two groups of the CPI, however, joined the rest of the opposition in having the no-confidence motion passed. The Congress Ministry vacated the office, the Assembly was dissolved, and fresh elections ordered.

This posed before us a question of tactics: Should the parties which joined in bringing the Congress government down unite in fighting the elections? On this as on many international and national issues, the two Communist Parties differed sharply. Knowing as we did the basically opposite positions of the left on the one hand and the Muslim League and "Rebel Congress" on the other, the left could not envisage a full programme-based united front. We, however, did not rule out some limited adjustments to ensure the defeat of as many Congress candidates as possible. The right C.P., on the other hand, took the stand that those parties being "even more reactionary" than the Congress, they could not be touched even with a pair of tongs. They were joined in this by the Kerala unit of the RSP. After weeks of protracted negotiations, these two parties went separately, contesting almost every seat for the Assembly.

The electoral scene was thus complicated: there was the Congress fighting single-handed, with full optimism that with the division in the CPI itself and there being no firm and full understanding among opposition parties, it could easily win a majority; the CPI and the RSP going together; the League and the "Rebel Congress" being in a full fledged alliance; our Party and a few other left groups and individuals together having adjustments with the Muslim League (though not with its ally) in a few constituencies, while in every other seat we fought each other. Our line had earlier been endorsed by our Party Congress, as the CPI's was endorsed by its Congress.

On the eve of the election, however, the Congress government at the Centre launched a vicious attack on our Party. Over a thousand comrades all over the country were arrested and kept

in detention without trial. All P.B. members, except Jyoti Basu and myself, were taken from Trichur where we were having a meeting to consider the follow-up of the Party Congress The arrests were followed by a government "white paper" making the wild allegation that we were not only "Chinese agents" but "preparing for an armed insurrection". Obviously intended to give campaign material for the Congress and the CPI-RSP combine against us, it was extensively used. With almost a majority of our candidates and a large number of activists at all levels being behind the bars, we were in for an unequal combat. On me, the sole survivor of the government's attack, fell the responsibility of working as the state campaigner and organiser of the Party in its election work.

It will be interesting to note that the name of the Party—the CPI (M)—was fixed by the Election Commission, and not by us. Claiming as the Seventh Congress had done to represent the undivided CPI, we called ourselves to be the CPI and applied to the Election Commission for recognition as the CPI. After having examined the number of MPs and MLAs, the Commission agreed to recognise us as another Communist Party and asked us to choose a name and symbol for ourselves. The Commission agreed, in the end, to name us as the CPI with the word Marxist added in brackets; as for the symbol, while the other CPI would keep the existing one, we would have it changed to hammer and sickle with a star.

Despite the difficulties involved in campaigning under such conditions, the electorate well understood us. Our record was stunning for our opponents—both the Congress and the CPI-RSP combine. We had the largest number of winning candidates, the Congress coming only second; the CPI had the largest number of candidates who lost deposits, with no seat for the RSP. It had thus been proved that, in the state where the undivided CPI formed its own government to begin with, the bulk of the masses supporting the Party were with the left and rejected the right—a distinct political gain for us.

There was, however, a practical difficulty : the bulk of our newly-elected MLAs were in jail; had they been out, we could have attempted to form a government and for that the support of other non-Congress parties in the Assembly could

have been sought. I, therefore, approached the Governor asking for their release and to give me the opportunity to try to form a government. He rejected both the demands, declaring that it was impossible to form a government in such circumstances and dissolved the Assembly which had, in fact, not even been formally constituted.

This underlined the urgency of a countrywide campaign for the release of those kept in detention without trial. My activities, therefore, could no more be confined to Kerala. In fact, our call for campaign for release of detenus (not only in Kerala but all over the country) received good response from the political activists as well as jurists and intellectuals who, in increasing numbers, joined in demanding an end to detention without trial. Conferences and conventions on civil liberties were held in various parts of the country. This entailed for me a good deal of travelling all over the country when I also had interviews with comrades in jail—in Calcutta, Bombay, Hyderabad, etc. In these activities I got help in Kerala also from the socialists, the CPI, etc.

It was also thought necessary to float a weekly organ of the Central Committee under the name *People's Democracy*, in English. It was brought out from Calcutta with Jyoti Basu as its editor. I was not personally associated with it; the work was done mostly by Central Committee member Ramdass, who was underground, though I contributed articles for the paper. (Mention may be made here of a series of articles I wrote to explain the content of the Party Programme in which certain topical questions were related to our programmatic understanding).

There was, in the meanwhile, a big change in the situation: not only did tension increase on the India-China border but actual hostilities broke out between India and Pakistan. The hysteria worked up in the earlier (1962) armed conflict with China was again roused, our Party being the main target in the campaign. Added to these was the question of Kashmir's special status (incorporated in the Constitution) which was used in the campaign not only against Sheikh Abdullah in that state but against our Party. Lal Bahadur Shastri, who succeeded Nehru as Prime Minister, made it a point to attack our Party asking:

"Why does Namboodiripad not go and stay in China?" For the three or four months that separated Jyoti Basu's arrest from mine, I was the only all-India campaigner who could answer all the allegations and defend the Party. While defending neither China nor Pakistan, I had to point out to all critics of the Party (including the Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, and our CPI friends) that the country's disputes with both have necessarily to be settled through negotiations, and not war, as they were suggesting. As for Jammu and Kashmir, I pointed out to the critics that any effort to upset the constitutional arrangement regarding that state (incorporated in the Indian Constitution) would prejudice the working of our federal set-up based on unity in diversity.

It throws a flood of light on the CPI (M)-CPI relations in those days that I was under attack for proposing that the Indo-Pakistan armed hostilities be ended and that the dispute be settled through negotiations and that at a time when the Soviet leaders were concerned about the conflict between the two countries. I, for my part, had no difficulty in welcoming the initiative taken by the Soviet Prime Minister, Kosygin, to bring the leaders of the two countries together, culminating in their Tashkent conference where a settlement was arrived at.

Within a few days of the successful conclusion of the Tashkent conference and Lal Bahadur Shastri's death that followed, I was arrested and detained but, within three months of the arrest, I was released—not alone but along with all other comrades in detention (including those in Maharashtra who had been in jail since 1962). The leaders of the government and the ruling party were obviously preparing for the elections to the fourth Lok Sabha (to be held in early 1967); the CPI (M) leaders and activists remaining in jail would have proved for them as much of a liability in the all-India context now as the 1964 detention was at the time of the 1965 elections to the Kerala Assembly.

After the release of the comrades a meeting of the Central Committee was held at Tenali in Andhra Pradesh. A few comrades who had been co-opted to the Committee after the 1964 arrests also participated. The political developments that took place in the intervening period were reviewed, and the line

pursued during the period was approved. The general line to be pursued to face the elections was discussed. But the clinching of the ideological questions facing the international movement, held over at the Seventh Party Congress, was once again postponed since the immediate task was to fight the elections. On this question and on some others which were the follow-up of the Party Congress (like the trade union and peasant questions), further discussions were held at a subsequent meeting of the Central Committee held at Nur Mahal in Punjab. The Party was thus, in a way, prepared to face the elections.

The Tenali and Nur Mahal meetings of the Central Committee revealed the emergence of a definite ultra-left trend within the Party, both on the international and national questions. An important factor helping its emergence was the Chinese Party's shift to the left as seen in the inauguration of the so-called Cultural Revolution. Those with 'leftist' tendencies on the programmatic and political stand of the Seventh Congress were encouraged to come out in defence of their line because of the further shift taken by the Chinese Party. This might have played some part in the lack of progress in some states in forging left unity to fight the elections, but the main factor was the obstructive stand adopted by the CPI. This was all the more so in West Bengal where the CPI knocked together a parallel combination with the Bangla Congress to fight the CPI (M)-led front. But in Kerala where they had a humiliating experience in 1965, the CPI and its RSP ally had to join the CPI (M)-led front, with the Muslim League as a partner. Even in West Bengal, after the elections, they had to join the CPI (M)-led front and form a coalition government.

The formation of these two left-oriented, CPI (M)-led governments in each of which the CPI became a partner, was thus a recognition of the reality that the CPI (M) was not only more principled but more in touch with practical politics than the CPI. The latter, however, showed that it had no scruples to throw its vaunted principles whenever it became necessary for "practical considerations"; no more did they have any inhibition to be a coalition partner with parties like the Jana Sangh, the Akalis, the Swatantra, etc., in some states. With a handful of MLAs in Punjab, U.P. and Bihar, they joined ministries headed

by the Akalis in Punjab, a former Congressman with the Swatantra ideology in U.P. and with the Jan Sangh as a partner in all the three. The CPI (M) had also been invited to join these ministries but it declined on the principle that, while it was its duty to help the formation of such non-Congress governments, it could not join any government which did not have a definite left orientation (which the West Bengal and Kerala governments had).

Joining the West Bengal and Kerala governments, however, was for the CPI the method with which an anti-CPI (M) combination could be knocked together. Working with the Bangla Congress in West Bengal, the Muslim League and a section of the Socialist Party in Kerala, the CPI built an anti-CPI (M) outfit or "mini-front" within these non-Congress coalitions. For full 31 months in Kerala and for two terms of about one year each in West Bengal, the CPI remained in the non-Congress front and government to fight the CPI (M) and, in the end, throw it out of the government. Their anti-CPI (M) struggle culminated in a Congress-CPI coalition government in Kerala, CPI support to the semi-fascist terror regime in West Bengal, and their hailing of the Emergency regime at the all-India level during 1975-77.

The ostensible reason for this turn from the 1967 participation in the "non-Congress governments dominated by reactionary and communal parties to coalition with the Congress was that, following the 1967 electoral debacle, the Congress under Indira Gandhi's leadership had turned to the left and deserved support from all genuinely left opposition parties". The CPI (M) too, made a positive assessment of and gave initial support to the shifts made by Indira Gandhi in 1969. It, however, noted that, having used its initially left stand on some issues like bank nationalisation and stoppage of privy purses to the princes, the Indira Congress and its government were mounting attacks on the civil liberties and democratic rights of the people.

On the other hand, some of the bourgeois opposition parties which had originally taken avowedly reactionary positions, subsequently took democratic stands on the ruling party's attacks on the common people's democratic rights.

Hence the initial support extended by the CPI (M) to Indira Gandhi in 1969 and the subsequent resistance to her in unity with the JP movement and its participants. The two Communist Parties formed in 1964, in other words, pursued two political lines which were tested in the crucible of such practical actions as threw the Congress out of power at the centre in 1977.

This made the CPI change its line, though only partly. Before dealing with it, however, we should go into the international relations of the two parties which emerged out of the two Congresses in 1964.

CHAPTER 29

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

AS NOTED EARLIER, THE CONGRESS OF THE CPI (M) held in October-November 1964 in Calcutta was followed by a request made by its General Secretary, Sundarayya, to the CPSU leadership in a letter seeking formal party-to-party relations between the two Parties. A copy of the letter was sent to other fraternal parties with a covering letter from Polit Bureau member, Basavapunnaiah. This, however, was not responded to, so that we had to go with no formal relations with most of the parties abroad.

This was in contrast to the Seventh Congress of the CPI held in Bombay in December which was attended by a large number of fraternal delegations, including the one from the CPSU whose delegation, headed by Secretary Ponomarov, presented the CPI Congress with a Lenin banner.

This was tomtommed both by the CPI leaders themselves as well as the bourgeois press as indicative of the CPSU recognition that the CPI was the authentic representative of the Indian communist movement. The "isolation of the Marxists" in the world communist movement due to their "pro-China" positions, was the central point of their campaign for the mid-term elections in Kerala when, as noted earlier, I had to shoulder the responsibility of running our campaign almost single-handed. I had to answer a number of questions raised by the government in its "white-paper", in the speeches and other propaganda material of the CPI and, above all, the hysterical propaganda undertaken by the bourgeois press.

Among the questions I was confronted was : "Do you have

any international support, as the CPI has ?" My retort was that, unlike the CPI whose leaders were using their largely-advertised support from the international movement to win the people in our country, we would first get the support of our own people and then of the international movement. Referring to the CPI claim of having been presented with a red banner by the CPSU delegation leader Ponomarov, I asked : "Is the red banner, brought by Ponomarov from the Soviet Union, accompanied by the votes for the CPI necessary to win the Kerala elections ?"

The outcome of the Kerala poll did partly prove me correct : the international "recognition" did not help the CPI, nor did our "isolation" prevent us from making a good record in electoral terms, making it obvious that support from the people and international contacts were two different things. Nor did it make any improvement in our relations with the Soviet or other fraternal parties who continued to believe that we were hand-in-glove with the Chinese Party.

As for the latter, they did maintain relations with us for about three years after our Seventh Congress. We, however, knew that they did not agree with the positions we adopted at the Congress. It was, therefore, quite on the cards that they too would break with us (which they did in 1967). That, however, did not deter us from pursuing our line because we were convinced that our general line was by and large correct and would, in the end, be vindicated. Whatever shortcomings were there in our understanding (which we were conscious of) could be corrected on the basis of experience gained in the process of implementing the line.

The creditable performance made in the Kerala mid-term elections and then in the country-wide fourth general elections made a slight change in the situation. Comrades abroad realised that we were fighting on our own and not at the dictates of the Chinese Party. The incontrovertible fact that, in the two strongest bases of the undivided communist movement (Kerala and West Bengal) as well as in Tripura, we came out as the strongest non-Congress party, led the CPSU to abandon its earlier characterisation of our Party as a "splitters' group"; we were honoured with the appellation of "the parallel Communist Party"

The change in the attitude of the CPSU was seen in a query informally made to me by a representative of the international department of the CPSU whether I would participate in the 40th anniversary of the Russian (1917) revolution if invited. The invitation was to be extended to me obviously in my capacity as the Chief Minister of Kerala and not as a member of the Polit Bureau. No invitation had been extended either to the General Secretary or to the Editor of the Party paper or any other representative of the Party. I, therefore, declined the invitation with thanks as, I said, my association with the Soviet Union had been as a communist and I would not like to participate in the anniversary of the glorious revolution as a "non-communist".

Absence of relations at the formal party-to-party level, however, did not preclude personal relations between the Soviet comrades and us. As a matter of fact, within a year of our Party Congress, the health condition of our General Secretary, Sundarayya, became serious. He was shifted from jail, where he was in detention, to the Osmania Hospital in Hyderabad. The doctors adviced him treatment abroad. The Soviet comrades agreed to take him to their country. After the government too agreed, he was taken there and sent back after an extremely complicated operation. Political differences and absence of formal party-to-party relations did not stand in the way of the Soviet comrades extending to us the assistance that was required to look after our ailing comrades. We were grateful to them.

In the meantime, our relations with the Vietnamese, Korean and Romanian comrades became regularised. Our delegation participated in the Romanian Party Congress in 1969. Ranadive and Surjeet had fraternal discussions with the Vietnamese comrades. The process of forging relations with the Korean Party culminated in a visit to Korea (in June 1970) by a three-member delegation, headed by General Secretary Sundarayya and including Pramode Das Gupta and myself, and discussions with their General Secretary, Kim Il Sung. (Other comrades also visited these socialist countries. I myself had a fortnight-long holiday along with my wife in Romania.) When our delegation was going to Korea (and later when I went to Romania with my

wife), we had to pass through Moscow. Comrades of the international department of the CPSU informally received us, though we had no formal party-to-party relations. The position, in short, was that while the overwhelming majority of fraternal parties headed by the CPSU kept us at arm's length in accordence with the formal party protocol, they were informally helpful to us. We, on our part, did not want to overstep the limits; we understood that with their political and practical opposition to us as a party, they could not extend to us the same facilities as were extended to the CPI.

I cannot help, in this context, referring to my visit to and stay in the German Democratic Republic for nearly two months in 1969. I was seriously ill. Doctors in Trivandrum suspeced a malignant tumour in my stomach, and decided on and made every preparation for an operation. Comrades in Trivandrum, including some doctors, suggested that if at all an operation was to be done, it must be done in a socialist country. The GDR Ambassador Herbert Fischer contacted the comrades in his country and secured an invitation from his Health Minister for me to go abroad. The necessary permission was given by the Central Governtment and therefore I proceeded to the GDR along with my wife, son and my personal surgeon. The four of us remained in the GDR for full two months. After detailed investigations the specialists in the Berlin state hospital advised against the operation since, according to them, there was no tumour, malignant or otherwise. I was advised to follow a particular diet regime which I am still continuing.

The whole programme was carried out in the spirit of the Party in GDR having no formal relations with me as a leader of our Party. We were guests of the Health Ministry. The protocol observed was that of the state. (I was then the Chief Minister of Kerala.) I was, however, provided with all the facilities that a comrade can expect (except formal discussions with the Central Committee; I had in fact a discussion at the Foreign Ministry). I was taken around many institutions of socialist development; the only previous similar experience I had was that of a two-month stay in the Soviet Union in 1963. I was highly impressed by the tremendous development taking place i n the socialist half of the fatherland of the founders of

Marxism. Being present at the National Day celebrations in Berlin (October 6) was comparable only with the celebrations of October 1 (1956) in Beijing and November 7 in Moscow (1960). As I noted in a statement issued on my return to Trivandrum : "I have come back from Marx's homeland with my health improved and my spirit uplifted."

The lasting impression left on me was that of the frontline state of world socialism; at the time of my earlier visit to Berlin (in 1960) to participate in the funeral of President Wilheun Pieck there was no Berlin Wall. It was within a few months of my visit that the Wall came up. On this occasion again, I went to the place and saw how the two worlds were facing each other. The Party and the government of socialist Germany were on full alert for anything that might be done by the adversary, while taking initiative after initiative for a new political set-up in which the capitalist and the socialist halves of Germany would be at peace which each other.

Comparable to the Berlin Wall which I saw in 1969 (and again in 1983) is the Pan Mun Jong village dividing the two which I saw in 1970. Both are points of division between the Koreas, capitalist and socialist worlds.

Although our relations with fraternal parties were thus registering steady improvement, the overwhelming majority of parties, with the CPSU at their head and including the SUPG, were still adopting positions which comrades in India could not understand. Although for several years the Chinese comrades carried on a barrage of propaganda against us, not to speak of keeping us at arm's length, our Soviet and other comrades echoed the bourgeois press and CPI propaganda that we were adopting "pro-China" positions. As for the ruling Congress and its government, the comrades abroad considered them "progressive", even inclined to socialism. Opposition to the Congress and its government therefore meant, according to them, playing the reactionary game. They went to the extent of hailing the attacks on democracy launched by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, which culminated in the clamping of Emergency, as "an attack on fascism". This was shown in an "anti-fascist rally" held at Patna in Bihar to which representatives of socialist countries and their ruling parties came. The rally which

they participated in, gave full-throated support to the Emergency.

While all this created prejudices among some comrades against the socialist countries and their communist parties, we kept our heads cool and refused to be provoked. As a matter of fact, on two occasions when the socialist countries and the fraternal parties leading them came under attack—the 1968 attempt of imperialist powers to take the clock of socialism back in Czechoslovakia, and later the serious ideologial offensive from so-called "Euro-Communism" to the established positions of Marxism-Leninism on a number of theoretical postulates—our Party defended the positions adopted by the Soviet and other parties. This stood in marked contrast to the positions adopted on the two questions by the so-called "pro-Soviet" CPI whose leaders took several months to shake themselves free from the revisionist positions adopted by the Dubcek leadership of the Czechoslovakian Party. At the time of the Euro-Communist offensive, too, the CPI leaders could not adopt the forthright stand that we did, of defending Marxism-Leninism from revisionist distortions.

It was against this background that the CPI line on internal questions—collaboration with the Congress, going to the extent of supporting the Emergency regime—ended in fiasco. The defeat of the Congress in the 1977 Lok Sabha elections amounted to a defeat for the CPI as well. It opend the eyes of comrades abroad to the reality that it was not the CPI but the CPI (M) which carried forward the best traditions, not only of patriotism and struggle for internal democracy, but of proletarian internationalism as well. That was therefore the beginning of a change in the attitude of fraternal parties towards our party. The earlier hesitation to have party-to-party relations with more than one party in a country was overcome. The existence of two Communist Parties with two different programmes, setting forth two perspectives of the revolution in India, came to be recognised.

In the meantime, the Chinese Communist Party too effected a change in its attitude on a number of questions—international as well as national. The process of correcting the "leftist" mistakes of the post-Eighth Congress years took time but it was comprehensive. A three-member delegation of our

Party, led by me, was invited to visit that country as part of this process. Our relations which were broken in 1967 were thus re-established.

This was closely followed by the normalisation of relations with the Soviet and several other fraternal parties. This fulfilled the desire expressed by us after the Seventh Congress for fraternal relations with all Communist parties.

The story of this reforging of formal relations with all Communist parties clinches the question of proletarian internaionalism to which we communists are committed. When in 1964 we broke ourselves off from our rightist comrades in the undivided CPI and formed ourselves into the CPI (M), we were attacked for straying from the path of proletarian internationalism. In fact, however, we were fighting for the restoration of world communist unity—a consummation devoutly wished by every proletarian internationalist. Being anti-China (as the CPI comrades have unfortunately been) is not a sign of proletarian internationalism but its very opposite. But I am happy that today, after 22 years of our programmatic commitment to the restoration of the world communist unity, the movement is steadily, though slowly, moving towards our cherished objective.

CHAPTER 30

INNER-PARTY STRUGGLES AFTER 1964

HAVING NARRATED THE STORY OF INNER-PARTY struggle before the 1964 split and then between the CPI (M) and the the CPI, let me now go into the developments within the CPI (M) itself. This is necessary because the inner-Party struggle of the CPI (M) after 1964, together with the struggle within the CPI in the same period, is part of the story of the struggle within the common communist movement. Restoration of communist unity in the country is impossible without an objective appraisal of the prolonged struggle in the undivided CPI, then between the two Communist Parties and within each of them.

At its Seventh Congress the CPI (M) was clear that, while one phase of the struggle against revisionism was coming to an end and while that struggle had to continue, the Party had to guard itself against sectarianism, not only because the documents of the international communist movement had warned that the danger of dogmatism raising its head in one or another party was very real, though revisionism then constituted the main danger. The concrete conditions of Indian politics were such as to raise the report and resolutions of the Seventh Congress; the ruling classes had entered a period of acute crisis, rapidly losing their authority among the people, making them (the common people) go into more and more militant actions.

There were, however, forces within as well as outside the ruling party which, while taking advantage of the growing popular discontent, were trying to divert it into wrong and disruptive channels. The Political-Organisational Report, the main resolution on the current situation, and that on the tasks

of the Party pointed out that all parties of the ruling classes—opposition as well as the ruling—were making demagogic use of one or another genuine demand of the people in their respective ways, and also diverting the mass discontent for opportunist and often disruptive purposes. A clear warning was therefore given against a tailist attitude towards the leaders of and a sectarian attitude towards the masses rallied behind the ruling as well as opposition bourgeois parties. Unity on issues that affect the people and rouse them into action, but independent critique of the stands adopted by the leaders of all bourgeois-landlord parties (ruling as well as opposition), so that all sections of the working people can be united on the basis of a minimum programme—this was the tactical line laid down by the Congress.

Though the Organising Committee which prepared for the Party Congress and the Central Committee elected at the Congress were united on this political-tactical line, this did not reach the Party as a whole. Fighting as they were against revisionism at the international as well as national levels, our comrades were to a very large extent swayed by dogmatic and left-sectarian considerations. The word of warning uttered at the Party Congress against sectarianism, therefore, did not become part of the intellectual and emotional make-up of a large number of comrades. It required sustained and energetic work of the entire leadership to transform the understanding of the entire Party.

This, however, was blocked by the wholesale arrest of Party leaders within less than two months of the Party Congress. Added to the difficuly caused by it was the systematic campaign carried on by the Chinese comrades through their media directed against the Congress government—a campaign run with a heavy sectarian thrust. Comrades in general were swayed by this campaign and thought that the Chinese assessment of the ruling classes in India was the Party line. The central leadership elected at the Party Congress, the bulk of whom were put behind bars immediately, could not even start the process of educating the Party on the basis of the Party Congress documents.

By the time the comrades were released, the damage had already been done. It was an uphill task for the P.B. and the C.C. to carry forward the line adopted at the Party Congress.

and start discussions on the questions that were left over at the Congress—ideological debates in the international movement and the questions to the fourth Lok Sabha and the state assemblies made it impossible to undertake a serious debate. The two Central Committee meetings that were held after the release—the first at Tenali in Andhra in June, and the second at Nurmahal in Punjab in October—were therefore devoted to a review of the work done during the period when the comrades were in jail and chalking out of the approach to the general elections.

The review of work done during the imprisonment of the bulk of comrades constituted in one sense a review of my own work. For, as noted earlier, I had almost single-handedly to deal with an extremely complicated situation when the Party was under attack from all sides. With my earlier background of vacillations in the struggle against revisionism, I was myself not sure as to how I would be able to discharge the task. The Party had to face a barrage of propaganda from the two great parties in the international movement as well as the government and the rest of the opposition on a host of problems which became more and more complicated every day. Confident that if I do stray here or there I would certainly be corrected by the Party when normal conditions were restored, and with a sense of responsibility to deal with the situation as it evolved, I did my work of answering all the charges laid against the Party in general and me in particular. At the end of it all, when the Central Committee met at Tenali in June 1966, it was found that, barring one mistake of being swayed by bourgeois nationalism, I had diicharged my responsibility well. This enhanced my self-confidence, as nothing else did in my entire life.

Discussions revealed that while in the Central Committee a handful of comrades were swayed by left-sectarian considerations, the P.B. was entirely united in fighting the trend. Furthermore, even those who were swayed by left-sectarianism considered it prudent not to give expression to them since the Party had to put its shoulders to the wheel of the mass campaign for the fourth general elections. The differences in the C.C. and lower down in the Party, therefore, got submerged in the political-practical work of rallying the masses for the Party and its allies in the struggle against the Congress regime.

As soon as the elections were over, however, the differences

came out clearly and sharply. The immediate provocation was that, having secured majorities for the Party and its allies in the two states of Kerala and West Bengal, Party-led governments were formed in the two states—a development with which a large number of comrades could not reconcile themselves. Adding fuel to the fire of dissent among the comrades was the fact that the Chinese Party and its government were using its radio and other media for the campaign that the CPI (M) has taken to "neo-revisionism". A large number of comrades were influenced by this, and on its basis emerged a new group called the Naxalites, rallying themselves openly and completely behind the Chinese Party as their own Party and the Chinese chairman as their own chairman.

This, indeed, was a serious development not only ideologically and politically but in physical terms. For, no sooner did they form themselves into a definite political group, the Naxalites pledged themselves to a plan of action in which "annihilation" of what they called "class enemy" occupied an important place; the leadership of the CPI (M) was included in the category of "class enemies". Important members of the Party at various levels were done to death by the Naxalites themselves or together with the Congress. Naxalites, in fact, became the main agency to be used by the government for establishment of terror regime in various parts of the country, going to its worst and naked form during the semi-fascist terror in West Bengal.

The first three years of the struggle against Naxalism (1967-1970) were a period in which there existed two CPI (M)-led governments in Kerala and West Bengal. Against those governments, though from different ends, the Congress, the CPI and the Naxalites synchronised thieir campaign which culminated in the toppling of the two governments. The P.B. and C.C., together with the entire Party, had to carry on a united campaign, which they did. The period witnessed important gains in the ideological field, such as open demarcation of the Party from the international line adopted by the CPC, the support to the action of the Warsaw Pact countries in Czechoslovakia, a further enrichment of the programmatic understanding on the relation between Party-led mass movements and struggles, on the one hand, and the left-oriented governments

which existed in Kerala and West Bengal on the other.

The fall of the two left-led governments and the situation that was created following it, however, eroded the unity which till then had continued in the leadership. Exchange of ideas on the tactics to be pursued in the new situation and their relation to the Party's programmatic understanding took place orally and in writing within the P.B. and, to a lesser extent, in the C.C. Failure to resolve the differences through these exchanges made it difficult for the leadership to function collectively, paralysing its work. This was reflected in the fact that the Ninth Congress of the Party held at Madurai (1972) could not be presented with an agreed Political-Organisational Report. After the Congress and then for another four years, the stalemate continued in the leadership and was resolved only in 1976. But by then the General Secretary, Sundarayya, tendered his resignation which was accepted by the Central Committee. I had to take over from him.

It is not necessary for me to spell out here the issues on which the Party leadership came to be divided, the different stands adopted by different comrades and how they were resolved. These have been explained in a fairly detailed manner in the review report presented to and adopted by the Tenth Congress held at Jalandhar in 1978. It is necessary to point out only that while in the beginning of the controversy there was no unanimity even among those who were not in agreement with the line adopted by Sundarayya (each of us taking his own independent line), continuous exchanges among us on the basis of experience gained in the period culminated in a broad agreement on the line to be pursued. That line was, firstly, of broad-based united actions against authoritarianism towards which the Congress and its government were moving; and, secondly, working towards a consolidation and unification of the left forces. In other words, unity of the left and a broader unity against authoritarianism supplementing and strengthening each other—this was the line formulated originally at the Ninth Congress (Madurai, 1972) and further elaborated at Jalandhar (1978). The two subsequent Congresses (Vijayawada in 1982, and Calcutta in 1986) further enriched the understanding originally given at Jalandhar.

While accepting Sundarayya's resignation from the General

Secretaryship, the rest of us in the P.B. and C.C. recalled his valuable role in building the Party. We therefore wanted, and he agreed, that, even after resigning as the General Secretary, he would continue in the P.B. Subsequently, however, he requested to be relieved of his responsibility as a P.B. member. This, we thought, was wrong as, to repeat what I said at the meeting where he made his request to be relieved, it was as a member of the P.B. that he could correct himself and try to correct the rest of us in the P.B. Unfortunately, however, he persisted and we had to agree, though he continued in the C.C. till he expired on May 19, 1985.

This, however, was not the only organisational aspect of the inner-party struggle in the CPI (M) after the Naxalite revolt. Two other Central Committee members—one each from Bihar and Rajasthan—revolted against the Party. Both of them having some following in their respective states, our opponents had put great store by their revolt. There was also the case of a leading member of the Andhra state leaership, Onkar, and later a leading comrade in Kerala, M.V.Raghavan. In every one of these cases, however, the Party leadership at the centre and in the concerned state could rally the entire Party and the masses behind it against the rebels and thus falsify the hopes of our opponents.

The lesson to be drawn from this story of inner-Party struggle in the CPI (M) is that a leadership that is collectively functioning on the basis of a correct ideological-political line can—and only such a collectively functioning leadership can effectively tackle the ideological, political and organisational problems with which the Party is always confronted. The economic and political situation in the country and in the world as a whole being ever in a state of flux, the nature of the problems that the Party has to deal with always changes. The effectiveness of Party leadership lies in keeping constant watch on the developments and working out the correct line in accordance with the universal and well-tested principles of Marxism-Leninism. This was emphasised in the report and resolution of organisation adopted at a plenum held at Salkia (Howrah) towards the end of 1978 and further developed in the Political and Organisational Reports presented to and adopted at the Vijayawada and Calcutta Congresses in 1982 and 1986 respectively.

How is it that a tiny four-member Kerala unit of the CPI in 1937 developed into the strongest political party in the state in the course of half-a-century ? How is it that, at the all-India level, too, the Communist Party which was relatively weak fifty years ago, has today become the only force which runs governments in three states, including Kerala ? And, how is it that the CPI(M) which, for several years, was considered out of the pale of the international communist movement, has now become a contingent of the international movement along with the CPI, and the recognised head of the Left and Left Democratic Fronts in the three states ?

These are the questions, and several others relating to the communist movement in India, on which the present book, penned by an active participant of Indian politics, throws light.

E.M.S. NAMBOODIRIPAD (b. 1909) joined the Civil Disobedience Movement while a student, in 1932. In 1934 he was elected a Joint Secretary of the newly formed Congress Socialist Party and formed its Kerala unit; he was also Secretary of the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee in 1934 and 1939-40. He is one of the founding members of the Kerala unit of the Communist Party of India, was elected to its Central Committee in 1941, and has been a member of its Polit Bureau since 1950. He functioned as the Party's Acting General Secretary in 1953, 1954 and 1955-56, and was its General Secretary in 1963-64. When the Party was reorganised in 1964, EMS joined the CPI(M) and has been a member of its Polit Bureau since then. He became its General Secretary in June 1977 and has since then been functioning in that capacity.

EMS was elected to the Madras Legislative Assembly in 1939 and to the Kerala Legislative Assembly in 1957, 1960, 1965, 1967 and 1977. He has twice been the Chief Minister of Kerala in 1957-59 and in 1967-69.

His major publications in English include *Kerala : Society and Politics, Indian Planning in Crisis, Crisis into Chaos,* and *A History of the Indian Freedom Struggle.* National Book Agency, Calcutta has also brought out his *Seclected Writings* in two volumes.

A prolific writer with a firm grasp on Indian economy, society and politics, EMS has been regularly contributing to Malayalam and English journals.

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